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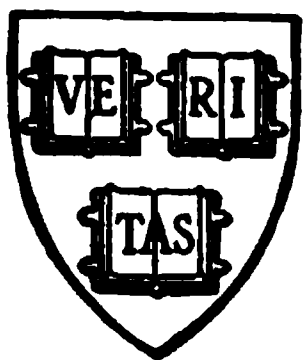
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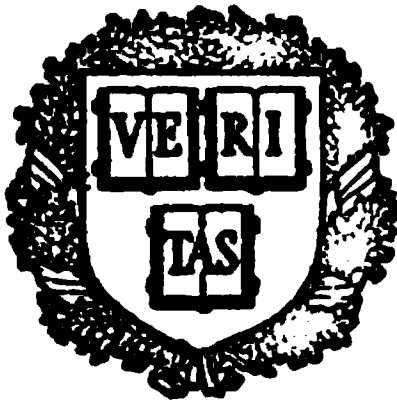
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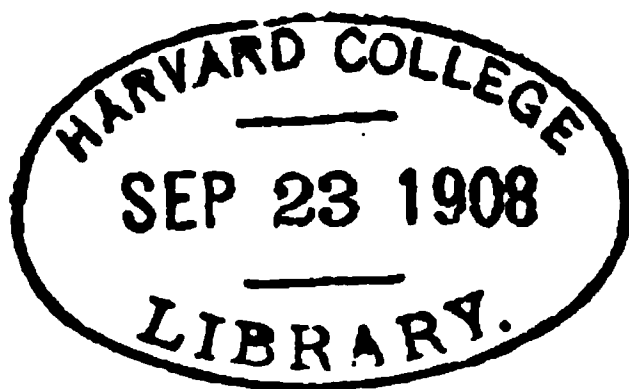
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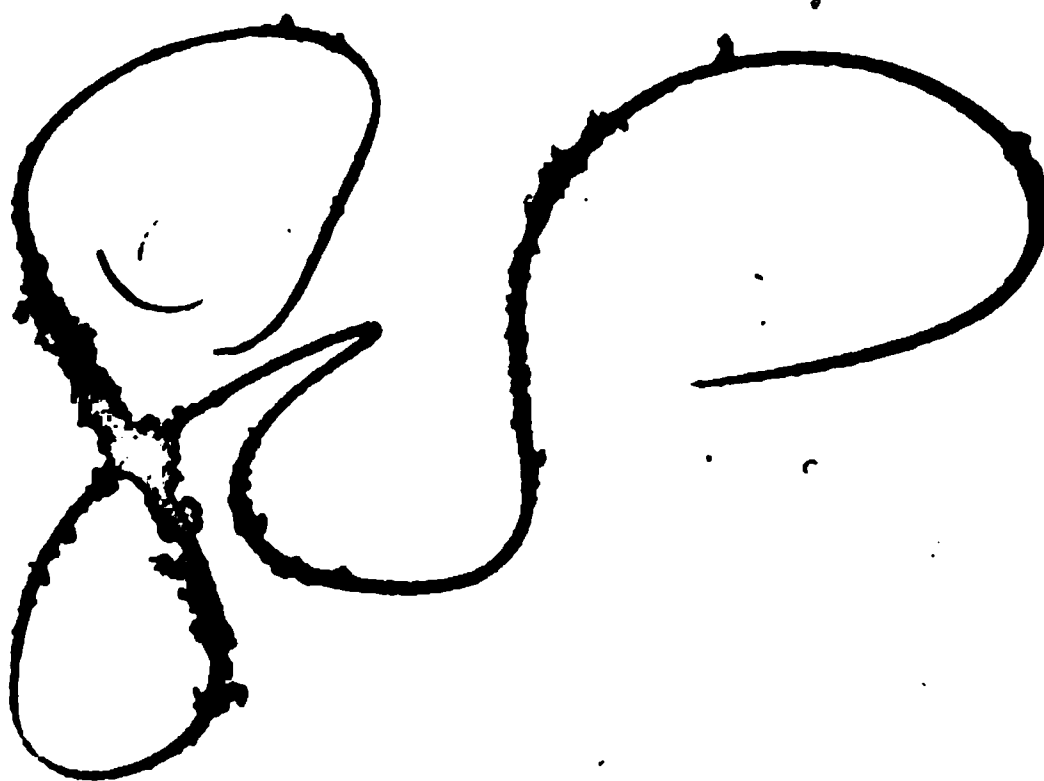


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BOOK I.

VOL. I.

B

11



CHAPTER I.

TOWARDS the close of last July, when the London season was fast dying of the dust, Otho Laurence had invited what the *Morning Post* called 'a select circle of friends,' to spend a quiet Sunday with him at his cool villa by the sea.

This singular retreat was the work of a very singular man, Otho Laurence's uncle, who had squandered on it an immense fortune, and had designed it as far as possible to embody his own tastes and character. He was a member of a Tory family of some note, and had near relations in both Houses of

Parliament ; but he was himself possessed of a deep, though quiet antipathy to the two things generally most cherished by those of his time and order, the ideas of Christianity and Feudalism ; and he studiously kept himself clear of all public life. Pride of birth, indeed, he had in no small measure ; but it was the pride of a Roman of the Empire rather than of an Englishman ; a pride which, instead of connecting him with a prince or people, made him shun the one as a Cæsar, and forget the other as slaves. All his pleasures were those of a lettered voluptuary, who would, as he himself said, have been more in place under Augustus or the Antonines ; and modern existence, under most of its aspects, he affected to regard as barbarous. Next to a bishop, the thing he most disliked was a courtier ; next to a courtier, a fox-hunting country gentleman. But nothing in his life, perhaps, was so characteristic of him as his leaving of it.

During his last hours he was soothed by a pretty and somewhat educated housemaid, whom he called Phyllis, and whom he made sit by his bedside, and read aloud to him Gibbon's two chapters on Christianity. Phyllis had just come to the celebrated excerpt from Tertullian, in which that father contemplates the future torments of the unbelievers, when the parish clergyman, who had been sent for by Mr. Laurence's widowed sister-in-law, arrived to offer his services. 'How shall I admire'¹—these were the words that, read in a low sweet tone, first greeted his ears when he was shown softly into the sick chamber—'how shall I admire, how laugh, how rejoice, how exult, when I behold so many proud monarchs, so many fancied gods, groaning in the lowest abyss of darkness; so many magistrates who persecuted the name of the Lord, liquefying in a fiercer

¹ Vide *Gibbon's Decline and Fall*, chapter xv.

fire than ever they kindled against the Christians!' The clergyman was at first much reassured at hearing words so edifying; but when he turned to old Mr. Laurence, he was dismayed to see on his pale face, no signs of awe, but only a faint smile, full of sarcastic humour. He therefore glanced at the book that was lying on the girl's lap, and discovered to his horror the work of the infidel historian. He was at first struck dumb, but, soon recovering himself, began to say something suitable at once to his own profession and to the sick man's needs. Mr. Laurence answered him with the greatest courtesy, but with many thanks declined assistance from him; saying wistfully that he knew he had not long to live, and that his one wish was that he could open his veins in a bath, and so fade gently into death; 'and then,' he added, 'my soul, if I have one, might perhaps be with Petronius, and with Seneca. And yet sleep would, I think,

better than even their company.' The poor clergyman bade a hasty adieu, and Phyllis resumed her reading. Mr. Laurence listened to every word: the smile returned to his lips that had for a moment left them, and was still upon them when, half-an-hour afterwards, he died, so quietly that Phyllis did not perceive it, but continued her reading for some time to ears that could hear nothing.

All his property he left to his nephew Otho, including his splendid villa, which was indeed, as it was meant to be, a type of its builder. It was a house of pillars, porticoes, and statues, designed ambitiously in what was meant to be a classical style; and though its splendours might not be all perhaps in the best taste, nor even of the most strictly Roman pattern, there was yet an air about its meretricious stateliness by which the days of the Empire were at once suggested to one, a magnificence that would at any rate

have pleased Trimalcio, though it might have scandalised Horace.¹

¹ The present writer has so little skill in describing fine houses, that he would have been here much at a loss, had not a fashionable lady novelist who knew the one in question—having been, in fact, the daughter of the housekeeper there—come to his assistance, and dictated the following description to him ; which, owing to a slight difference in the style, he has been unable to incorporate into the text. ‘There above the sea, and overlooking it, with the everlasting sea-breeze in its Parian porticoes, stood the villa, of which a Roman noble might have been proud—in which a Lucullus might have feasted, or a Clodius wreathed the brows of Aspasia with rose-petals. Laurence’s Folly the simple country folk termed it ; and folly perhaps it was, but a splendid folly, and one of which none but a patrician, whose blood beat blue from the heart to the taper finger-tips, could have been ever guilty. Its lofty pillared halls with their tessellated floors—work of cunning artists from over sea—struck dumb with awed amazement such of the favoured country squires as had occasional access to them, with their buxom wives decked in their best apparel, and their daughters arrayed in the flimsy fashion of the neighbouring town. Rare exotics glowing in marble vases perfumed the air ; exquisite frescoes on the wall caught the eye. Greek statues, in their mute immortal loveliness, rested calmly upon their granite plinths. In the libraries and drawing-rooms stood cabinets full of priceless antiquities, any one of which would have dowered an Earl’s daughter. Jars and vases from China and Japan, Roman hand-mirrors, in which Faustina had perhaps surveyed her more than human loveliness, iridescent phials of glass, in which Locusta had perhaps stored her poisons, luxurious couches, some covered with purple velvet, some with crimson, inlaid tables, paintings, marbles, bronzes by

Otho Laurence inherited with his uncle's house something of the tastes and feelings of which it was the embodiment. But, though an epicure by training and by temper, he had been open to other influences as well. At one time of his life, he had, as it is expressed by some, experienced religion; and not religion only, but thought and specula-

immortal masters——' The lady, who had once helped to make an inventory of the chief valuables in the house, went on to repeat, in a more coloured form, as much of it as she recollected. She then proceeded: 'Here, in this superb retirement, dwelt Otho Laurence, the celebrated epicurean of modern society—here seeking retirement from the caresses of the selectest circles in London, in a yet selecter circle of his own. All day long, through his gilded rooms, sounds of soft music stole; and dainty-footed Circassian girls, and stealthy Odalisques, looking like strayed houris from Paradise——' The author here interposed to tell her that Otho Laurence was not at all such a man as she described, nor in the least given to such company. She immediately, seeing one road barred, started off with fresh alacrity on another: 'Often on the broad terrace outside, during the long summer evenings, haughty and titled groups of the English Aristocracy watched the crimson after-glow die away over the long horizon. Here it was that Ivo de Grantmesnil, a scion of one of the proudest English houses, which had thrice refused a peerage that had been laid at his feet ——' But our friend had automatically begun a novel, with which we are not concerned at this moment.

tion also. Indeed, ever since he was two
four, he had been troubled by a painful sense
that he ought to have some mission in
The only difficulty was that he could
none that would suit him. He had consid-
erable natural powers, and was in many ways
a remarkable man; but, unhappily, one of
those who are remarkable because they
not become famous, not because they
He was one of those of whom it is said
they are thirty, that they will do something
till they are thirty-five, that they might
something if they chose; and after that,
they might have done anything if they
chosen. Laurence was as yet only three
years gone in the second stage, but such
his friends as were ambitious for him feared
that three years more would find him languishing
in the third. He, too, was beginning to
share this fear; and, { not being hurried
enough to despair of himself, was by
time taking to despair of his century. }

was thus hardly a happy man ; but, like many unhappy men, he was capable of keen enjoyments. Chief amongst these was society in certain forms, especially a party in his own house, such as that which he had now assembled there. To this one in particular he looked forward with more than usual pleasure, partly because of the peculiar elements which he had contrived to combine in it, but chiefly because amongst them was to be his friend Robert Leslie, who had been living abroad, and whom he had not seen for two years.

Laurence's aunt, Lady Grace, helped to receive the guests, who by dinner-time on Saturday evening had all arrived. Robert Leslie was the last. The dressing-bell had just done ringing as he drove up to the door, and the others had already gone upstairs ; but he found Laurence in the library, sitting with his head on his hand, and a pile of *menu* cards on the desk before him.

The two friends met with much warmth, and then examined each other's faces to see if either had changed.

'You told me you had been ill,' said Laurence, having again looked at Leslie, 'and I am afraid you don't seem quite well yet.'

'You forget,' said Leslie, whose laugh was a little hollow, 'that I was on the sea six hours ago; and, as you know, I am a wretched sailor. But the worst of human maladies are the most transient also—love that is half despairing, and sea-sickness that is quite so.'

'I congratulate you,' said Laurence, again examining his friend's face, 'on your true cynical manner. I often thought we might have masters in cynicism just as we have masters in singing. Perhaps I shall be able to learn the art from you.'

'Oh!' said Leslie, 'the theory is simple enough. Find out, by a little suffering, what

are the things you hold most sacred, and most firmly believe in, and, whenever an occasion offers, deny your faith. < A cynic is a kind of inverted confessor, perpetually making enemies for the sake of what he knows to be false. >

‘Ah!’ said Laurence, ‘but I don’t want theory. I know what is sacred just as well as you, and, when I am beast enough to be quite out of tune with it, I have the good sense to call it a phantom. But I don’t do this with sufficient energy. It is skill in cynical practice I want—a lesson in the pungent manner—the bitter tone——’

‘Then please not to take your lessons from me,’ said Leslie. ‘Imitation may be the sincerest flattery, but it is, of all, the most irritating: and a cynic, as you are good enough to call me, feels this especially. For a cynic is the one preacher, remember, that never wants to make converts. His aim is to outrage, not to convince: to create enemies,

not to conquer them. The peculiar charm that his creed has for him, is his own peculiarity in holding it. He is an acid that can only fizz with an alkali, and he therefore hates in others what he most admires in himself. So if you hear me say a bitter thing, please be good enough to brim over immediately with the milk of human kindness. If I say anything disrespectful about friendship, please be good enough to look hurt; and if I happen to say—what is the chief part of the cynic's stock-in-trade—that no woman was ever sincere or faithful, I trust you have some lady amongst your visitors who will look at me with mournful eyes, and say to me, "Ah, if you did but know!"

'Well,' said Laurence, 'perhaps I have; but, talking of what people are to say, I have something here about which I want you to help me. You see these cards; they are all double. Now that second half is for something quite new, and of my own invention.

The cook has written his part already, so you need not look so alarmed ; but he has only provided for the tongue as a tasting instrument ; I am going to provide for it as a talking one. In fact I am going to have a *menu* for the conversation, and to this I shall make everyone strictly adhere. For it has always seemed absurd to me to be so careful about what we put into our mouths, and to leave chance to arrange what comes out of them ; to be so particular as to the order of what we eat, and to have no order at all in what we talk about. This is the case especially in parties like the present, where most of the people know each other only a little, and if left to themselves would never touch on the topics that would make them best acquainted, and best bring out their several personal flavours. That is what I like to see conversation doing. I ought to have written these *menus* before ; but I have been busy all day, and, besides, I wanted you to help me. I

was just beginning without you when you arrived, as I could wait no longer, but I had put down nothing yet: indeed I could not begin upon the first topic that is to correspond with the soup—the first vernal breath of discussion that is to open the buds of the shy and strange souls. So come, now—what shall we begin with? What we want is something that anyone can talk easily about, whether he knows anything of it or not—something, too, that may be treated in any way, either with laughter, feeling, or even a little touch of temper.'

'Love,' suggested Leslie.

'That is too strong to begin with,' said Laurence, 'and too real. Besides, introduced in that way, it would be, I think, rather common and vulgar. No—the only thing that suggested itself to me was religion.'

'Nothing could be better in some ways,' said Leslie; 'but might not that, too, be rather strong meat for some? I apprehend

like Bottom, that "the ladies might be afraid of the lion." I should suggest rather the question, "Are you High-church or Low-church?" There is something in that which at once disarms reverence, and may also just titillate the interests, the temper, or the sense of humour. Quick, he said, taking one of the cards, and let us begin to write.

'Stop,' said Laurence; 'not so fast, let me beg of you. Instead of religion, or anything connected with it, we will have "What is the Aim of Life?" Is not this the thing of things to suit us? About what do we know less or talk more? There is a Sphinx in each of our souls that is always asking us this riddle; and when we are lazy or disappointed, we all of us lounge up to her, and make languid guesses. So about this we shall all of us have plenty to say, and can say it in any way we like, happy, serious, or sentimental. Think, too, how many avenues

of thought and feeling it opens up ! Evidently the " Aim of Life " is the thing to begin with.'

Leslie assented ; and before many minutes they had made the *menu* complete.

The ' Aim of Life ' was to be followed by ' Town and Country,' which was designed to introduce a discussion as to where the Aim of Life was to be best attained. After this, by an easy transition, came ' Society ;' next by way of *entrées*, ' Art and Literature,' ' Love and Money,' ' Riches and Civilisation ;' then ' The Present,' as something solid and satisfying ; and lastly, a light superfluity to dally with, brightly coloured and unsubstantial, with the *extremets* came ' The Future.'

' And who is here,' said Leslie, as they were ending their labours, ' to enjoy this feast of reason ?'

' I will tell you,' said Laurence. ' In the first place, there is Lady Ambrose, a woman

of a very old but poor family, who has married a modern M.P. with more than a million of money. She is very particular about knowing the right people, and has lovely, large grey eyes. Then there is Miss Merton, a Roman Catholic young lady, the daughter of old Sir Ascot Merton, the horse-racing evangelical. I knew her well five years ago, but had not seen her since her conversion, till to-day. Then we have Dr. Jenkinson, the great Broad-church divine who thinks that Christianity is not dead, but changed by himself and his followers in the twinkling of an eye.'

'I met Dr. Jenkinson,' said Leslie, 'just before I went abroad, at a great dinner given by Baron Isaacs, in honour of his horse having won the Derby. Well—and who else is there?'

'Two celebrated members of the Royal Society,' said Laurence; 'no less persons

than——But, good gracious! it is time we were upstairs dressing. Come along directly, and I will explain the other people to you before dinner.'

CHAPTER II.

IT was half-past eight, and the party were fast assembling in the twilight drawing-room. Leslie was lounging in one of the windows, by a large stand of flowers and broad-leaved plants, and was studying the company with considerable interest. His first impression was of little more than of a number of men's dark coats and white shirt-fronts, tables, couches, and gilded chairs, and the pleasant many-coloured glimmerings of female apparel. But before long he had observed more minutely. There were men who he instinctively felt were celebrities, discoursing to groups of ladies;

there were
were attracti
groups of m
Lady Ambro
nce saw
to by
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roman of
perhaps thirty, with the large grey eyes of
which Laurence had spoken, and a very
clear complexion. Leslie was much prepos-
sessed by her frank manner, and by her
charming voice, as she was talking with some
animation to a tall distinguished-looking
young man, whose fine features, keen earnest
glance and thoughtful expression prepos-
sessed him still more. Forming a third in
this group, dropping in a word or two at
intervals, he recognised the celebrated Dr.
Jenkinson—still full of vigour, though his
hair was silver—the sharp and res. less
sparkle of whose eyes, strangely joined with
the most benevolent of smiles, Leslie remem-
bered to have noticed at Baron Isaac's
festival. He had just identified Lady
Ambrose and the Doctor, when Laurence

came up to him in the window, and began to tell him who was who.

‘Dr. Jenkinson is the only one I know,’ said Leslie, ‘and, naturally enough, he forgets me.’

‘Well,’ said Laurence, ‘that man by himself, turning over the books on the table—the man with the black whiskers, spectacles and bushy eyebrows—is Mr. Storks of the Royal Society, who is great on the physical basis of life, and the imaginative basis of God. The man with long locks in the window, explaining a microscope in so eager ^{Hussey} a way to that dark-haired girl, is Professor Stockton—of the Royal Society also; and member and president of many Societies more. The girl—child, rather, I ought to call her—that he is talking to, is Lady Violet Gresham—my second cousin. You see my aunt, the old lady with grey curls, on the ottoman near the fire-place? Well—the supercilious-looking man, talking rather

loudly and rather slowly to her about dust in London, is Mr. Luke, the great critic and apostle of culture. That, too, is another critic close by him—the pale creature, with large moustache, looking out of the window at the sunset. He is Mr. Rose, the Raphaelite. He always speaks in an uncertain tone, and his two topics are self-indulgence and art. The young man there with Lord Ambrose and Dr. Jenkinson, is Lord Al. He is only two or three and twenty; so had you been in England lately, you would often have heard his name. He has come early into an immense property, and he is conscious that he has duties in life. He said Laurence sighing, 'he too feels as I feel that he has fallen on evil days, in which there can be no peace for us—little doubt and confusion, and what seems to me a losing battle against the spiritual darkness of this world. However—that headstrong youth thinks very differently.'

is Mr. Saunders from Oxford, supposed to be very clever and advanced. Next him is Donald Gordon, who has deserted deer-stalking and the Kirk, for literature and German metaphysics.'

'And who is that,' said Leslie, 'the young lady with those large and rather sad-looking eyes and the delicate, proud mouth?'

'Which?' said Laurence.

'The one on the sofa,' said Leslie, 'who looks so like a Reynolds' portrait—like a duchess of the last century—the lady in the pale blue dress, talking to that man with such a curiously attractive smile and the worn melancholy look?'

'That,' said Laurence, 'is Miss Merton. I am glad you admire her. And don't you know who it is she is talking to? He is almost the only man of these days for whom I feel a real reverence—almost the only one of our teachers who seems to me to speak with the least breath of inspiration. But he

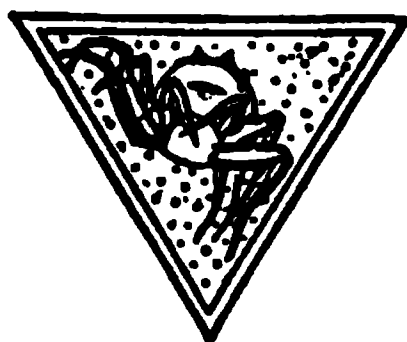
is too impressionable perhaps—too much like me, in that way. And now, as the years come, it seems that hope is more and more leaving him, and things look darker to him than ever. That is Herbert.’

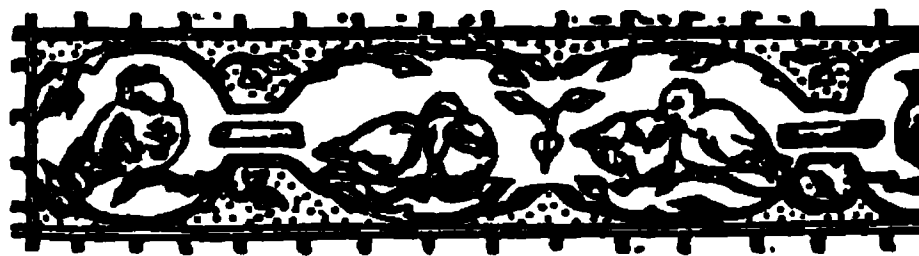
‘Herbert!’ exclaimed Leslie, ‘so it is. I thought I recollected the face. I have heard him lecture several times at the Royal Institution; and that singular voice of his, which would often hold all the theatre breathless, haunts me still, sometimes. There was something strange and ærial in its exquisite modulations, that seemed as if it came from a disconsolate spirit, hovering over the waters of Babylon, and remembering Sion. I can’t tell exactly why it was that—but, ah!—my dear Laurence—who is this, that is coming into the room now—this lovely creature, with a dress like a red azalea? What speaking eyes! And what hair too—deep dead black, with those white starry blossoms in it. I don’t think I ever saw anyone move so

gracefully ; and how proudly and piquantly she poises

On her neck the small head buoyant, like a bell-flower
on its bed !'

'That,' said Laurence, when Leslie had done, 'is Mrs. Sinclair, who has published a volume of poems, and is a sort of fashionable London Sappho. But come,—we shall be going into dinner directly. You shall have Lady Ambrose on one side of you, and shall take in Miss Merton.'





CHAPTER III.

LAURENCE, though he had warned his guests of his anxiety before they left the drawing-room, yet felt a little anxious when they sat down to dinner ; for he found it not altogether easy to get the conversation started. Lady Anne, who was the first to speak, began soon to get off the point.

‘What a charming change it is, Laurence,’ she said, ‘to look out on the street when one is dressing, instead of across the street at Audley Street!’

‘Hush!’ said Laurence, softly, with a grave, reproving, smile.

'Really,' said Lady Ambrose, 'I beg your pardon. I thought Dr. Jenkinson had said grace.'

'If he has,' said Laurence, 'it is very good of him, for I am afraid he was not asked. But what I mean is, that you must only talk of what is on the cards; so be good enough to look at your *menu*, and devote your attention to the Aim of Life.'

'Really, this is much too alarming,' said Lady Ambrose. 'How is one to talk at so short a notice on a subject one has never thought about before?'

'Why, to do so,' said Laurence, 'is the very art of conversation; for in that way, one's ideas spring up fresh like young roses that have all the dew on them, instead of having been kept drying for half a lifetime between the leaves of a book. So do set a good example, and begin, or else we shall never be started at all; and my pet plan will turn out a fiasco.'

There was, indeed, as Laurence said there was something very near complete silence around the table. It was soon broken.

'Are you High-church or Low-church?' was a question suddenly uttered in a quick eager girl's voice, by Miss Prattle, a young lady of eighteen, to the astonishment of the whole company. It was addressed to Dr. Jenkinson who was sitting next her.

Had a pin been run into the Doctor's leg, he could not have looked more astounded, or given a greater start. He eyed his fastidious questioner for some time in complete silence.

'Can you tell me the difference?' he said at last, in a voice of considerable good humour, yet with just a touch of sharpness in it.

'I think,' said Miss Merton, who was sitting on the other side of him, 'that my card is a little different. I have the "Aims of Life" on mine, and so I believe have everybody else.'

'Well,' said the Doctor laughing, 'let us ask Miss Prattle what is her aim in life.'

'Thank Heaven,' said Laurence, 'Dr. Jenkinson has begun. I hope we shall all now follow.'

Laurence's hope was not in vain. The conversation soon sprang up everywhere; and the company, though in various humours, took most of them very kindly to the solemn topic that had been put before them. Mr. Luke, who was sitting by Mrs. Sinclair, was heard in a loudish voice saying that his own favourite Muse had always been Erato; Mr. Rose had taken a crimson flower from a vase on the table, and, looking at it himself with a grave regard, was pointing out its infinite and passionate beauties to the lady next him; and Mr. Stockton was explaining that the Alps looked grander, and the sky bluer than ever, to those who truly realised the atomic theory. No one, indeed, was silent except Mr. Herbert and Mr. Storks, the former of

whom smiled rather sadly, whilst the latter looked about him with an inquisitorial frown.

Laurence was delighted with the state of things, and surveyed the table with great satisfaction. Whilst his attention was thus engaged, Lady Ambrose turned to Leslie, and began asking him if he had been in town much this season. She was taken with his look, and wished to find out if he would really be a nice person to like.

‘Please,’ interposed Laurence, pleadingly, ‘do try and keep to the point—please, Lady Ambrose.’

‘I want to find out Mr. Leslie’s aim in life by asking him where he has been,’ she answered.

‘I have been in a great many places,’ said Leslie, ‘but not to pursue any end—only to try and forget that I had no end to pursue.’

‘This is a very sad state of things,’ said Lady Ambrose; ‘I can always find some-

ing to do, except when I am quite alone, or the country when the house is empty. And even then I can *make* occupation. I law, or read a book, or teach my little boy me lessons. But come—what do you think the real aim of life? Since that is what I just ask him, is it not, Mr. Laurence?’

‘Don’t ask me,’ said Leslie; ‘I told you hadn’t a notion; and I don’t suppose we y of us have.’

‘That can’t be true,’ said Lady Ambrose, or just listen how everyone is talking. I ish we could hear what they are saying. ou might learn something then, perhaps, Mr. Leslie, since you are so very ignorant.’

It happened that, as Lady Ambrose said this, the conversation suddenly flagged, and Laurence took advantage of the lull to ask if any satisfactory conclusions had been come to during the past five minutes, ‘because we up here,’ he said, ‘are very much in the dark, and want to be enlightened.’

'Yes,' said Mr. Storks, gruffly, 'has any one found out what is the aim of life?' As he said this he looked about him defiantly, as though all the others were butterflies, that he could break, if he chose, upon his wheel. His eye at last lit upon Mr. Saunders, who, considering this a challenge to himself, immediately took up the gauntlet. The young man spoke with the utmost composure, and, as his voice was high and piercing, everybody could hear him.

'The aim of life,' he said, adjusting his spectacles, 'is progress.'

'What is progress?' interrupted Dr. Jenkinson, coldly, without looking at Mr. Saunders, and as though any answer to his question was the last thing he expected.

'Progress,' replied Mr. Saunders, slowly, 'has been found, like poetry, somewhat hard to define.'

'Very true,' said the Doctor, drily, and looking straight before him.

His accents were of so freezing a sharpness that he seemed to be stabbing Mr. Saunders with an icicle. Mr. Saunders, however, was apparently quite unwounded.

‘But I,’ he continued with the utmost complacency, ‘have discovered a definition which will, I think, meet with general acceptance. There is nothing original in it—it is merely an abstract of the meaning of all our great liberal thinkers—progress is such improvement as can be verified by statistics, just as education is such knowledge as can be tested by examinations. That, I conceive, is a very adequate definition of the most advanced conception of progress, and to persuade people in general to accept this, is at present one of the chief duties of all earnest men.’

‘Entirely true!’ said Mr. Herbert, with ironical emphasis; ‘an entirely true definition of progress as our age prizes it.’

Mr. Saunders was delighted, and, im-

aging he had made a disciple, he turned to Mr. Herbert and went on.

‘For just let us,’ he said, ‘compare a man with a gorilla, and see in what the man’s superiority lies. It is evidently not in his ideas of God, and so forth—for in this the gorilla is presumably free from these the man is the superior of the man—but in the hard verifiable fact, that the man can build houses and cotton-mills, whereas the highest monkey can scarcely make the rudest approach to a hut.’

‘But can you tell me,’ said Mr. Herbert, ‘supposing men some day come to a state in which no more of this progress is possible, what will they do then?’

‘Mr. Mill, whom in almost all things I hold in reverence as a supreme authority,’ said Mr. Saunders, ‘asked himself that very question. But the answer he gave himself was on the few things in which I venture to differ from him. For, when all the greater evils

life shall have been removed, he thinks the human race is to find its chief enjoyment in reading Wordsworth's poetry.'¹

'Indeed!' said Mr. Herbert; 'and did Mill come to any conclusion so sane as that?'

'I, on the contrary, believe,' Mr. Saunders went on, 'that as long as the human race lasts, it will still have some belief in God left in it, and that the eradication of this will afford an unending employment to all enlightened minds.'

Leslie looked at Lady Ambrose, expecting to see her smile. On the contrary she was very grave, and said, 'I think this is shocking.'

'Well,' said Laurence in a soothing tone to her, 'it is only the way of these young men in times of change like ours. Besides, he is very young—he has only just left Oxford——'

¹ *Vide* J. S. Mill's Autobiography.

'If these irreligious views are to be picked up at Oxford,' said Lady Ambrose, 'I shall be obliged to send my little boy, when he grows up, to Cambridge. And as for what you say about "times of change"—I am not a conservative, as you know—indeed I quite go in for reform, as my husband does: but I don't think *religion* ought to be dragged into the matter.'

'Well,' said Laurence, 'let us listen to what Lord Allen is saying.'

'*He* is sure,' said Lady Ambrose, 'not to say anything but what is nice.'

Allen was speaking in a low tone, but his voice was so clear that Lady Ambrose was quite able to hear him.

'To me it seems,' he was saying, blushing a little as he found suddenly how many people were listening to him, 'that the aim of life has nearly always been plain enough in a certain way—always, and for all men——'

‘Indeed?’ said Mr. Saunders, raising his eyebrows.

‘Yes,’ said Allen, slightly turning towards him, and raising his voice somewhat. ‘It has been, I think, as a single magnet, acting on all, though upon many by repulsion. It is quite indescribable in words. But there are two things by which you can tell a man’s truth to it—a faith in God, and a longing for a future life.’

‘Lord Allen,’ exclaimed Mr. Herbert, and the sound of his voice made everyone at once a listener, ‘that is very beautifully put! And it is, indeed, quite true as you say, that the real significance of life must be for ever indescribable in words. But in the present day, I fear also, that for most of us it is not even thinkable in thought. The whole human race,’ he went on in measured melancholy accents, ‘is now wandering in an accursed wilderness, which not only shows us no hill-top whence the promised land may be seen,

but which, to most of the wanderers, seems a promised land itself. And they have a God of their own too, who engages now to lead them out of it if they will only follow him: who, for visible token of his Godhead, leads them with a pillar of cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night—the cloud being the black smoke of their factory chimneys, and the fire the red glare of their blast-furnaces. And so effectual are these modern divine guides, that if we were standing on the brink of Jordan itself, we should be utterly unable to catch, through the fire and the smoke, one single glimpse of the sunlit hills beyond.'

Mr. Herbert said these last words almost fiercely; and they were followed by a complete hush. It was almost directly broken by Mr. Rose.

'To me,' he said, raising his eyebrows wearily, and sending his words floating down the table in a languid monotone, 'Mr.

Herbert's whole metaphor seems misleading. I rather look upon life as a chamber, which we decorate as we would decorate the chamber of the woman or the youth that we love, tinting the walls of it with symphonies of subdued colour, and filling it with works of fair form, and with flowers, and with strange scents, and with instruments of music. And this can be done now as well—better rather—than at any former time: since we know that so many of the old aims were false, and so cease to be distracted by them. We have learned the weariness of creeds; and know that for us the grave has no secrets. We have learned that the aim of life is life; and what does successful life consist in? Simply,' said Mr. Rose, speaking very slowly, and with a soft solemnity, 'in the consciousness of exquisite living—in the making our own each highest thrill of joy that the moment offers us—be it some touch of colour on the sea or on the mountains, the early dew in the crimson

shadows of a rose, the shining of a woman's limbs in clear water or——'

Here unfortunately a sound of 'Sh' broke softly from several mouths. Mr. Rose was slightly disconcerted, and a pause that would have been a little awkward seemed imminent. Laurence, to prevent this, did the first thing that occurred to him, and hastily asked Dr. Jenkinson what his view of the matter was.

The Doctor's answer came in his very sharpest voice.

'Do any of us know what life is?' he said. 'Hadn't we better find that out first?'

'Life,' continued Mr. Rose, who had now recovered himself, 'is a series of moments and emotions.'

'And a series of absurdities too, very often,' said Dr. Jenkinson.

'Life is a solemn mystery,' said Mr. Storks, severely.

'Life is a d——d nuisance,' muttered Leslie to himself, but just loud enough to be heard by Lady Ambrose, who smiled at him with a sense of humour that won his heart at once.

'Life is matter,' Mr. Storks went on, 'which, under certain conditions not yet fully understood, has become self-conscious.'

'Lord Allen has just been saying that it is the preface to eternity,' said Mr. Saunders.

'Only, unfortunately,' said Laurence, 'it is a preface that we cannot skip, and the dedication is generally made to the wrong person.'

'All our doubts on this matter,' said Mr. Saunders, 'are simply due to that dense pestiferous fog of crazed sentiment that still hides our view, but which the present generation has sternly set its face to dispel and conquer. Science will drain the marshy grounds of the human mind, so that the deadly malaria of Christianity, which has

already destroyed two civilisations, shall never be fatal to a third.'

'I should rather have thought,' said Mrs. Sinclair, in her soft clear voice, and casting down her eyes thoughtfully, 'that passion and feeling were the real heart of the matter: and that religion of some sort was an ingredient in all perfect passion. There are seeds of feeling in every soul, but these will never rise up into flowers without some culture—will they, Mr. Luke?' And this culture is, surely,' she said, dreamily, 'the work of Love who is the gardener of the soul, and of Religion, the under-gardener, acting as Love bids it.'

'Ah, yes!' said Mr. Luke, looking compassionately about him. 'Culture! Mrs. Sinclair is quite right; for without culture we can never understand Christianity, and Christianity, whatever the vulgar may say of it, is the key to life, and is co-extensive with it.'

Lady Ambrose was charmed with this sentiment.

‘Quite so, Mr. Luke, I quite agree with you,’ she said, in her most cordial manner. ‘But I wish you would tell me a little more about Culture. I am always so much interested in those things.’

‘Culture,’ said Mr. Luke, ‘is the union of two things—fastidious taste and liberal sympathy. These can only be gained by wide reading guided by sweet reason ; and when they are gained, Lady Ambrose, we are conscious, as it were, of a new sense, which at once enables us to discern the Eternal and the absolutely righteous, wherever we find it, whether in an epistle of St. Paul’s or in a comedy of Menander’s. It is true that culture sets aside the larger part of the New Testament as grotesque, barbarous, and immoral ; but what remains, purged of its apparent meaning, it discerns to be a treasure beyond all price. And in Christi-

anity—such Christianity, I mean, as true taste can accept—culture sees the guide to the real significance of life, and the explanation,’ Mr. Luke added with a sigh, ‘of that melancholy which in our day is attendant upon all clear sight.’

‘But why,’ said Allen, ‘if you know so well what life’s meaning is, need you feel this melancholy at all?’

‘Ah!’ said Mr. Luke, ‘it is from this very knowledge that the melancholy I speak of springs. We—the cultured—we indeed see. But the world at large does not. It will not listen to us. It thinks we are talking nonsense. Surely that is enough to sadden us. Then, too, our ears are perpetually being pained and deafened by the din of the two opposing Philistinisms—science and orthodoxy—both equally vulgar, and equally useless. But the masses cannot see this. It is impossible to persuade some that science can teach them nothing worth knowing, and

others that the dogmatic utterances of the gospels are either ignorant mistakes, or oriental metaphors. Don't you find this, Jenkinson?' he added, addressing the Doctor across the table in a loud mournful voice.

'Laurence,' said the Doctor, apparently not hearing the question, 'haven't we talked of this quite long enough? *Town and Country*—let us go on to that; or else we shall be getting very much behindhand.'

These words of the Doctor's caused a rapid change in the conversation. And as it appeared impossible to agree as to what the aim of life was, most turned eagerly to the simpler question of where it might be best attained. At first there seemed to be a general sense on all sides that it was a duty to prefer the country. There, the voices of Nature spoke to the soul more freely, the air was purer and fresher; the things in life that were really valuable were

more readily taken at their true worth; foolish vanities and trivial cares were less likely to degrade the character; one could have flowers; one could listen to the music of birds and rivers; a country house was more comfortable than a town one, and few prospects were so charming as an English park. But the voice of Mr. Saunders was soon heard proclaiming that progress was almost entirely confined to towns, and that the modern liberal could find little scope for action in the country. 'If he does anything there,' Mr. Saunders said, 'he can only make his tenants more comfortable and contented and that is simply attaching them more to the existing order of things. Indeed, even now, as matters stand, the healthy rustic with his fresh complexion and honest eye is absolutely incapable of appreciating the tyranny of religion and society. But the true liberal is undeceived by his pleasing exterior, and sees a far nobler creature in

the pale narrow-chested operative of the city, who at once responds to the faintest cry of insurgence.'

Slight causes often produce large results ; and these utterances of Mr. Saunders turned the entire torrent of opinion into a different channel. Mr. Luke, who had a moment before been talking about 'liberal air,' and 'sedged brooks,' and 'meadow grass,' now admitted that one's country neighbours were sure to be narrow-minded sectarians, and that it was better to live amongst cultured society, even under a London fog, than to look at all the splendour of provincial sunsets, in company of a parson who could talk of nothing but his parishioners and justification by faith. Others, too, followed in the same direction ; and the verdict of the majority soon seemed to be that, except in a large country house, country life, though it might be very beautiful, was still very tiresome. But the voice of Mr. Saunders was again heard, during a

pause, laying it down that no true liberal could ever care to live in the country now; and Lady Ambrose, who highly disapproved of him and his views in general, saw here a fitting opportunity for contradicting him, asserting that, though she and her husband were both advanced liberals, yet the pleasantest part of their year was that spent upon their moor in Scotland. 'And then, too,' she added, turning to Laurence, 'I am devoted to our place in Gloucestershire, and I would not miss for anything such things as my new dairy, and my cottages, with the old women in them.'

'And yet,' said Laurence, smiling, 'Sir George would never go near the place if it were not for the shooting.'

'Indeed he would,' said Lady Ambrose, a little indignantly. 'He likes the life so much, and is so fond of his gardens, and greenhouses, and——'

But she was here interrupted by M.

Herbert, who, mistaking the Sir George Ambrose mentioned for another Baronet of the same name—a gentleman of a very old, but impoverished Catholic family, broke in as follows, somewhat to the consternation of Lady Ambrose, whose husband was a great cotton-spinner, of the most uncertain origin.

‘Sir George,’ he said, ‘is, as I know well, an entirely honest gentleman of ancient lineage. He is indeed a perfectly beautiful type of what the English Squire properly ought to be. For he lives upon his own land, and amongst his own people; and is a complete and lovely example to them of a life quite simple indeed, but in the highest sense loyal, noble, and orderly. But what is one amongst so many? To most of his own order Sir George Ambrose appears merely as a mad-man, because he sees that it is altogether a nobler thing for a man to be brave and chivalrous than it is to be fashionable; and because he looks forward on his dying day to

remembering the human souls that he has saved alive, rather than the pheasants that he has shot dead.'

Now the husband of Lady Ambrose being known to most present for his magnificent new country house, his immense preserves and his yacht of four hundred tons that never went out of the Solent; there was naturally some wonder excited by Mr. Herbert's words, since the thought of any other Sir George never came for an instant into any one's head. Lady Ambrose herself was in utter amazement. She could not tell what to make of it, and she was as near looking confused as she had ever been in her life. The awkwardness of the situation was felt by many: and to cover it a hum of conversation sprang up, with forced alacrity. But this did not make matters much better; for in a very short time Mr. Herbert's voice was again audible, uttering words of no measured denunciation against the great land-owners of

England, 'who were once,' he said, 'in some true sense a Nobility, but are now the portentousest Ignobility that the world ever set eyes upon.' Everyone felt that this was approaching dangerous ground: nor were they at all reassured when Mr. Herbert, who was, it appeared, quoting from a letter which he had received, he said, that morning from the greatest of modern thinkers, concluded amidst a complete silence with the following passage, '*Yes, here they come, with coats of the newest fashion, with pedigrees of the newest forging, with their moors in Scotland, with their rivers in Norway, with their game preserves in England, with some thousands of human beings calling them masters, somewhere—they probably forget where—and with the mind of a thinking man, or with the heart of a gentleman, nowhere. Here they come, our cotton-spinning plutocrats, bringing in luxury, and vulgarity, and damnation!*'

These last words came like a thunder-

clap. Laurence hardly knew where to look. The result, however, was more satisfactory than could have been expected. There are some emotions, as we all know, that can be calmed best by tears. Lady Ambrose did not cry. She did something better—she laughed.

‘What would poor Sir George say?’ she whispered to Laurence. ‘He is fishing in Norway at this very moment. But do you really think,’ she went on, being resolved not to shirk the subject, ‘that Society is really as bad as Mr. Herbert says? I was looking into the Comte de Grammont’s Memoirs the other day, and I am sure nothing goes on in London now so bad as what he describes.’

‘Do you know, Lady Ambrose,’ said Mr. Herbert, who concluded that he had given her much pleasure by his late remarks, ‘I think the state of London at the present day infinitely worse than anything’

Grammont or his biographer could have dreamt of.'

'Quite so,' said Mr. Luke; 'the bulk of men in our days are just as immoral as they were in Charles the Second's; the only difference is that they are incomparably more stupid; and that, instead of decking their immorality with the jewels of wit, they clumsily try to cover it with the tarpaulin of respectability. This has not made the immorality any the better; it has only made respectability the most contemptible word in the English language.'

'The fop of Charles's time,' said Leslie, 'aimed at seeming a wit and a scholar. The fop of ours aims at being a fool and a dunce.'

'Yes,' said Mr. Herbert, 'society was diseased then, it is true, and marks of disease disfigured and scarred its features. Still, in spite of this, it had some sound life left in it. But now the entire organism is dissolving

and falling asunder. All the parts are refusing to perform their functions. How, indeed, could this possibly be otherwise, when the head itself, the aristocracy, the part whose special office is to see and think, has now lost completely both its brains and eyes, and has nothing head-like left it except the mouth ; and that cannot so much as speak. It can only eat and yawn.'

'Society, you see, Mr. Herbert,' said Lady Ambrose, who felt bound to say something, 'is so much larger now than it was.'

'Oh,' said Laurence, shrugging his shoulders, 'in that sense, I really think there is almost no society now.'

'I don't see how there can be,' said Miss Merton, 'when what is called society is simply one great scramble after fashion. And fashion is such a delicate fruit, that it is sure to be spoilt if it is scrambled for.'

'I am glad,' said Laurence, 'you don't

abuse fashion as some people do. I look on it as the complexion of good society, and as the rouge of bad; and when society gets sickly and loses its complexion, it takes to rouge—as it is doing now; and the rouge eats into its whole system, and makes its health worse than ever.'

'You are the last person, Mr. Laurence,' said Lady Ambrose, 'you who go out so much, that I should have expected to hear talking against society like that.'

'Ah!' said Laurence, 'we cannot escape from our circumstances. I only wish we could. I go into the best society I can get, but I am not blind to the fact that it is very bad. Of course there are a number of the most delightful people in it. I am not denying that for a moment. But not only is society not made up out of a few of its parts, but even the best parts suffer from the tone of the whole. And taking society as a whole, I honestly doubt if it was ever at any time

so generally bad as it is now. I am not saying that it has forgotten its duties—that it cannot even conceive that it ever had any. That is of course quite true: but Mr. Herbert has said that already. I am not complaining of its moral badness, but of its social badness—of its want of practical skill in life as a fine art—a want that it often feels itself, and yet has not the skill to remedy. Think for a moment how barbarous are its amusements; how little culture there is in its general tone; how incapable it is of any enlightened interest!’

‘Really,’ said Mr. Stockton, ‘I think you are doing society a great injustice. It seems to me that enlightened interest is the very thing that is everywhere on the spread. The light of intellect is emerging from the laboratory and the dissecting-room, where it had its birth, and is gilding, with its clear rays, the dinner-table, and even the ball-room. A freer, a truer, and a grander view of things,

seems to me to be rapidly dawning on the world.'

'I fear, my dear sir,' said Mr. Luke, 'that these pleasing opinions of yours will not bear testing.'

'Do you mean,' said Mr. Stockton, 'that society as a rule is not infinitely better informed now than it was thirty years ago? Has it not infinitely fewer prejudices and infinitely more knowledge?'

'We should look to the effects of the knowledge, not to the knowledge itself,' said Mr. Luke. 'We cannot test the health of a society from looking over its examination papers in physical science.'

'How would you test it?' said Mr. Stockton, with a slight curl of the lip.

'There are many tests,' said Mr. Luke. 'Here is one, amongst the very subjects that Mr. Laurence has ordered us to talk about—art and literature.'

'I accept the test,' said Mr. Stockton.

‘What, then, can be nobler than much modern poetry? There is some that I look upon as quite of the highest order.’

‘When I spoke of our literature,’ said Mr. Luke, loftily, ‘I was not thinking of poetry. We have no poetry now.’

‘Indeed?’ said Mr. Stockton; ‘I imagined you had written some yourself.’

‘Ah!’ exclaimed Mr. Luke, drawing a long sigh, ‘I once knew what Goethe calls “the divine worth of tone and tears.” But my own poems only prove the truth of what I say. They could only have been written in evil days. They were simply a wail of pain, and now that I am grown braver, I keep silence. Poetry in some ages is an expression of the best strength; in an age like ours it is the disguise of the worst weakness—or, when not that, it is simply a forced plant, an exotic. No, Mr. Stockton, I was not speaking of our poetry, but of the one kind of imaginative literature, that is the natural growth of our

own day, the novel. Now the novel itself is a plant which, when it grows abundantly and alone, you may be sure is a sign of a poor soil. But don't trust to that only. Look at our novels themselves, and see what sort of life it is they image—the trivial interests, the contemptible incidents, the absurdity of the virtuous characters, the viciousness of the characters who are not absurd. Spain was in some ways worse in Cervantes' time than England is in ours; but you may search all our novels for one character that has one tithe of Don Quixote's heroism, for one of our sane men that breathed in so healthy and pure an atmosphere as the inspired madman. And this is not from want of ability on the novelist's part. Some of them have powers enough and to spare; but the best novels only reflect back most clearly the social anarchy, and the bad ones are unconscious parts of it.'

'And as for our painting,' said Mr.

Herbert, 'that reflects, even more clearly than our literature, our hideous and our hopeless degradation. The other day, when I walked through the Royal Academy, my mind was literally dazzled by the infernal glare of corruption and vulgarity that was flashed upon me from every side. There were, indeed, only two pictures in the whole collection that were not entirely abominable; and these were, one of them three boulders in the island of Sark, the other a study of pebbles on the beach at Ilfracombe.'

'I know little about the technicalities of art,' said Mr. Stockton, 'so I will not presume to dispute this point with you.'

'Well,' said Leslie, 'here is another test quite as good as art and literature—love and money, and their relations in our days.'

He would have continued speaking; but Mr. Herbert allowed him no time.

'The very things,' he said, 'I was about to touch upon—the very things the pictures

the other day suggested to me. For seeing how the work of the painter becomes essentially vile so soon as it becomes essentially venal, I was reminded of the like corruption of what is far more precious than the work of any painter—our own English girls, who are prepared for the modern marriage-market on precisely the same principles as our pictures for the Royal Academy. There is but one difference. The work of the modern painter is vile from its very beginning—in its conception and execution alike ; but our girls we receive, in the first instance, entirely fair and sacred from the hands of God himself, clothed upon with a lovelier vesture than any lilies of the field——’

‘Really,’ whispered Lady Ambrose to Laurence, ‘Providence has done so very little for us, as far as vesture goes.’

‘——And we,’ Mr. Herbert went on, ‘with unspeakable profanity presume to

dress and to decorate them, till the heavenly vesture is entirely hidden, thinking, like a modern Simon Magus, that the gifts of God are to be purchased for money, and not caring to perceive that, if they are to be purchased with the devil's money, we must first convert them into the devil's gifts.'

'Yes,' said Mrs. Sinclair, with a faint smile, 'the day for love-matches is quite gone over now.'

But her words were drowned by Mr. Saunders, who exclaimed at the top of his voice, and in a state of great excitement, 'Electric telegraphs—railways—steam printing presses—let me beg of you to consider the very next subject set for us—riches and civilisation—and to judge of the present generation by the light of that.'

'I have considered them,' said Mr. Herbert, 'for the last thirty years—and with inexpressible melancholy.'

‘I conceive,’ said Mr. Saunders, ‘that you are somewhat singular in your feelings.’

‘I am,’ replied Mr. Herbert, ‘and that in most of my opinions and feelings I am singular, is a fact fraught for me with the most ominous significance. Yet how could I—who think that health is more than wealth, and who hold it a more important thing to separate right from wrong than to identify men with monkeys—how could I hope to be anything but singular in a generation that deliberately, and with its eyes open, prefers a cotton-mill to a Titian?’

‘I hold it,’ said Mr. Saunders, ‘to be one of the great triumphs of our day, that it has so subordinated all the vaguer and more lawless sentiments to the solid guidance of sober economical considerations. And not only do I consider a cotton-mill, but I consider even a good sewer, to be a far nobler and a far holier thing—for holy in reality does not

mean healthy—than the most admired Madonna ever painted.'

'A good sewer,' said Mr. Herbert, 'is, admit, an entirely holy thing; and would our manufacturers and men of science bury themselves underground, and confine their attention to making sewers, I, for one, should have little complaint against them.'

'And are railways, telegraphs, gas-lamps—is the projected Channel tunnel, nothing in your eyes? Is it nothing that all the conditions of life are ameliorated, that mind is daily pursuing farther its conquest over matter?'

'Have we much to thank you for,' said Mr. Herbert, 'that you have saved us from an hour of sea-sickness, if in return you give us a whole lifetime of heart-sickness? Your mind, my good sir, that you boast of, is so occupied in subduing matter that it is entirely forgetful of subduing itself—a matter, trust me, that is far more important. And as for you

amelioration of the conditions of life—that is not civilisation which saves a man from the need of exercising any of his powers, but which obliges him to exert his noble powers ; not that which satisfies his lower feelings with the greatest ease, but which provides satisfaction for his higher feelings, no matter at what trouble.’

‘Other things being equal,’ said Mr. Saunders, ‘I apprehend that the generation that travels sixty miles an hour is at least five times as civilised as the generation that travels only twelve.’

‘But the other things are *not* equal,’ said Mr. Herbert : ‘and the other things, by which I suppose you mean all that is really sacred in the life of man, have been banished or buried by the very things which we boast of as our civilisation.’

‘That is our own fault,’ said Mr. Saunders, ‘not the fault of civilisation.’

‘Not so,’ said Mr. Herbert. ‘Bring up

a boy to do nothing for himself—make everything easy for him—to use your own expression, subdue matter for him—and that boy will never be able to subdue anything for himself. He will be weak in body, and a coward in soul——'

'Precisely,' said Mr. Saunders. 'And that is really, if you look dispassionately at the matter, a consummation devoutly to be wished. For why do we need our bodies to be strong? To overcome obstacles. Why do we need to be brave? To attack enemies. But by and bye, when all our work is done by machinery, and we have no longer any obstacles to overcome, or any hardships to endure, strength will become useless, and bravery dangerous. And my own hope is that both will have ere long vanished; and that weakness and cowardice, qualities which we now so irrationally despise, will have vindicated their real value, by turning universal civilisation into universal peace.'

‘Yes,’ said Mr. Herbert, ‘that is exactly what the modern world is longing for—a universal peace; which never can nor will mean anything else than peace with the devil.’

‘Really,’ said Lady Ambrose to Leslie, ‘do you think we are in such a bad way as all this? Dr. Jenkinson, I must ask you—you always know these things—do you think we are so very bad?’

‘Yes—yes,’ said the Doctor, turning towards her with a cheerful smile, ‘there is a great deal that is very bad in our own days—very bad indeed. Many thoughtful people think that there is more that is bad in the present than there has ever been in the past. Many thoughtful people in all days have thought the same.’

‘Whenever wise men,’ said Herbert, ‘have taken to thinking about their own times, it is quite true that they have always thought ill of them. But that is because the

times must have gone wrong before the wise men take to the business of thinking about them at all. We are never conscious of our constitutions till they are out of order.'

'Ah! yes,' said Mr. Luke; 'how true that is, Herbert! Philosophy may be a golden thing. But it is the gold of the autumn woods that soon falls, and leaves the boughs of the nation naked.'

'Yes,' said Leslie, 'leaving nothing but

Bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.'

'Thank you, Mr. Leslie,' exclaimed Mr. Herbert across the table, 'thank you—an exquisitely apt quotation.'

'Then you, Mr. Leslie,' said Lady Ambrose in a disappointed voice, 'you are one of these desponding people too, are you? I never heard anything so dismal in my life.'

'I certainly think,' said Leslie, 'that our age in some ways could not possibly be worse. Nobody knows what to believe, and most

people believe nothing. Don't you find that?'

'Indeed I do not,' said Lady Ambrose, with some vigour, 'and I am very sorry for those who do. That Mr. Saunders,' she added, lowering her voice, 'is the first person I ever heard express such views. We were dining only the other day with the Bishop of —, and I'll tell you what he said, Mr. Leslie. He said that the average number of churches built yearly during the last ten years was greater than it had ever been since the Reformation. That does not look as if religion was on the decline, does it? I know the Bishop spoke of a phase of infidelity that was passing over the nation: but that, he said, would soon have drifted by. Indeed he told us that all the teachings of modern irreligious science were simply reproductions of—you must not laugh at me if I say the names wrong—Epicurus and Democritus—which had been long ago refuted. And that

was no peculiar crotchet of his own mind ; for a very clever gentleman who was sitting next me said that that was the very thing which all the bishops agreed in saying—almost the only thing indeed in which they did agree.'

'Ah !' said Leslie, 'materialism once came to the world like a small street boy throwing mud at it ; and the indignant world very soon drove it away. But it has now come back again, dirtier than ever, bringing a big brother with it, and Heaven knows when we shall get rid of it now.'

'In every state of transition,' said Dr. Jenkinson to Miss Merton, 'there must always be much uneasiness. But I don't think,' he said, with a little pleased laugh, 'that you will find these times really much worse than those that went before them. No—no. If we look at them soberly, they are really a great deal better. We have already got rid of a vast amount of superstition and ignorance, and are learning what Christianity

really is. We are learning true reverence—that is, not to dogmatise about subjects of which we cannot possibly know anything.'

'Just so, Jenkinson,' said Mr. Luke; 'that is the very thing I am trying to teach the world myself. Personal immortality, for instance, which forms no part of the sweet secret of authentic Christianity——'

'Yes—yes,' said the Doctor, hastily; 'the Church had degraded the doctrine. It needed to be expressed anew.'

'Of course,' said Miss Merton, 'I, as a Catholic——'

'Dear! dear!' exclaimed the Doctor, in some confusion, 'I beg your pardon. I had no notion you were a Roman Catholic.'

'I was going to say,' Miss Merton went on, 'that, though of course as a Catholic I am not without what I believe to be an infallible guide, I feel just as much as anyone the bad state in which things are now. It is so difficult to shape one's course in life. One

has nowhere any work cut out for one. There is a want of—well—' she said smiling 'of what perhaps, when religion has been analysed by science, will be called moral ozone, in the air.'

'Such a feeling is not unnatural,' said the Doctor; 'but you will find it vanish if you just resolve cheerfully to go on doing the duty next you—even if this be to only order dinner. And,' he said, turning to her rather abruptly, 'don't despond over the times. That only makes them worse. Besides, they are not really at all bad. There is no need for desponding at all.'

'But there is at least excuse,' said Laurence, 'when we see all the old faiths, the old ideas, under which the world has so long found shelter, fading

Like the baseless fabric of a vision,
rapidly and for ever away from us.'

'I don't think so,' said the Doctor, as if that settled the question.

‘Christianity,’ said Mr. Stockton, ‘is only retiring to make way for something better. Religions are not quickened unless they perish. Look forward at the growing brightness of the future, not at the faded brightness of the past.’

‘Why not look at the present?’ said Dr. Jenkinson. ‘Depend upon it, it is not wise to be above one’s times. There’s plenty of religion now. The real power of Christianity is growing every day, even where you least expect it.’

‘In what part of Christianity,’ said Leslie, ‘its real power lies, it would be unbecoming in me to profess that I knew. But this I do know, that if you take four out of five of the more thoughtful and instructed men of the day, you will find that not only have they no faith in a personal God, or a personal immortality, but the very notions of such things seem to them absurdities.’

‘Yes,’ said Mr. Herbert, ‘it was once

thought a characteristic of the lowest savages to be without a belief in a future life. It will soon be thought a characteristic of the lowest savages to be with one.'

'Really now—' said Mr. Luke, in a voice whose tone seemed to beseech everyone to be sensible, 'personal immortality and a personal Deity are no doctrines of Christianity. You, Jenkinson, I know agree with me.'

There was nothing the Doctor so disliked as these appeals from Mr. Luke. He made in this case no response whatever. He turned instead to Miss Merton.

'You see,' he said to her in a very quiet but very judicial way, 'the age we live in is an age of change. And in all such ages there must be many things that, if we let them, will pain and puzzle us. But we mustn't let them. There have been many ages of change before our time, and there are sure to be many after it. Our age is not peculiar.'

Here he paused, as he had a way of

doing at times between his sentences. This practice now, as it had often been before, was of a disservice to him; for it gave a fatal facility for interruption when he could least have wished it. In this case Leslie entirely put him out, by attacking the very statement which the Doctor least of all had designed to bear question.

‘But in some ways,’ said Leslie, ‘this age is peculiar, surely. It is peculiar in the extraordinary rapidity of its changes. Christianity took three hundred years to supplant polytheism; atheism has hardly taken thirty to supplant Christianity.’

Dr. Jenkinson did not deign to take the least notice of this.

‘I suppose,’ said Miss Merton to Leslie, ‘that you think Catholicism quite a thing of the past.’

‘I’m afraid,’ said Leslie, ‘that my opinion on that is of very small importance. But, however that may be, you must admit that in

the views of the world at large there have been great changes; and these, I say, have come on us with so astonishing a quickness that they have plunged us into a state of mental anarchy that has not been equalled since mental order has been known. There is no recognised rule of life anywhere. The old rules only satisfy those who are not capable of feeling the need of any rule at all. Every one who does right at all only does what is right in his own eyes. All society, it seems, is going to pieces.'

'I,' said Mr. Rose, 'look upon social dissolution as the true condition of the most perfect life. For the centre of life is the individual, and it is only through dissolution that the individual can re-emerge. All the warrings of endless doubts, all the questionings of matter and of spirit, which I have myself known, I value only, because, remembering the weariness of them, I take a profounder and more exquisite pleasure in

the colour of a crocus, the pulsations of a chord of music, or a picture of Sandro Botticelli's.'

Mr. Rose's words hardly produced all the effect he could have wished ; for the last part was almost drowned in the general rustle of the ladies rising.

'Before we go, Mr. Laurence,' said Lady Ambrose, 'will you be good enough to tell me the history of these salt-cellars? I wanted to have asked you at the beginning of dinner, but you made yourself so very appalling then, that I really did not venture.'

'Well,' said Laurence, 'no doubt they surprise you. They were a present made to me the other day by a friend of mine—an eminent man of science, and are models of a peculiar kind of retort he has invented, for burning human bodies, and turning them into gas.'

'Good gracious!' said Lady Ambrose,

'how horrible! I insist, Mr. Laurence, on your having another set to-morrow night—remember.'

'There,' said Laurence, when the gentlemen had resettled themselves, and had begun their wine, 'there is the new version of the skeleton at the banquet-board—the two handfuls of white dust, to which we, the salt of the earth, shall one day crumble. Let us sacrifice all the bulls we have to *Pluto illacrimabilis*—let us sacrifice ourselves to one another, or to Heaven—to this favour must we come. Is not that so, Mr. Storks?'

'Laurence,' said Dr. Jenkinson, briskly, 'the conversation hasn't kept pace with the dinner. We have got no farther than "The Present" yet. The ladies are going to talk of "The Future" by themselves. See—there they are out on the terrace.'

Mr. Storks here drew his chair to the table, and cleared his throat.

'It is easier,' he said, 'to talk about the

present now we are alone—now *they*,' he nodded his head in the direction of the party outside, 'are gone out to talk about the future in the moonlight. There are many things which even yet it does not do to say before women, at least before all women.'

'My aunt,' said Laurence, 'is a great authority on woman's education and true position; and she has written an essay to advance the female cause.'

'Indeed?' said Mr. Storks; 'I was not aware of that. I shall look forward with much pleasure to some conversation with her. But what I was going to say related to the present, which at dinner was on all sides so mercilessly run down. I was going to claim for the present age, in thought and speculation (and it is these that give their tone to its entire conduct of life), as its noble and peculiar feature, a universal, intrepid, dogged resolve to find out and face the complete

truth of things, and to allow no prejudice however dear to us, to obscure our vision. This is the only real morality: and not only is it full of blessing for the future, but it is giving us "manifold more in this present time" as well. The work of science, you see, is twofold; it enlarges the horizon of the mind, and improves the conditions of the body. If you will pardon my saying so, Mr. Herbert, I think your antipathy to science must be due to your not having fully appreciated its true work and dignity.'

'The work of science is, I know, twofold,' said Mr. Herbert, 'speculative and practical.'

'Exactly so,' said Mr. Storks, approvingly.

'And all it can do for us in speculation,' said Mr. Herbert, 'is to teach us that we have no life hereafter: all it can do for us in practice, is to ruin our life here. It enervates us by providing us with base luxury; it d

grades us by turning our attention to base knowledge.'

'No—no,' said Dr. Jenkinson, with one of his little laughs, 'not that. I don't think Mr. Storks, that Mr. Herbert always quite means what he says. We mustn't take him at his word.'

'My dear sir,' said Mr. Herbert, turning to the Doctor, 'you are a consecrated priest of the mystical Church of Christ'—Dr. Jenkinson winced terribly at this—'and let me ask you if you think it the work of Christ to bring into men's minds eternal corruption, instead of eternal life—or rather not corruption, I should say, but putrefaction. For what is putrefaction but decomposition? And at the touch of science all our noblest ideas decompose and putrefy, till our whole souls are strewn with dead hopes and dead religions, with corpses of all the thoughts we loved

Quickening slowly into lower forms.

You may call it analysis, but I call it death.'

‘I wish we could persuade you,’ said Mr. Stockton, very temperately, ‘to take a fairer view of things. Surely truth cannot in the long run be anything but life-giving.’

‘Let us take care of facts,’ said Mr. Storks, ‘and fictions—I beg your pardon, religion—will take care of itself.’

‘And religion,’ said Mr. Stockton, ‘will take care of itself very well. Of course we don’t waste time now in thinking about personal immortality. *We* shall not live; but the mind of man will; and religion will live too, being part of the mind of man. Religion is, indeed, to the inner world what the sky is to the outer. It is the mind’s canopy—the infinite mental azure in which the mysterious source of our being is at once revealed and hidden. Let us beware, then, of not considering religion noble; but let us beware still more of considering it true. We may fancy that we trace in the clouds shapes of real things; and, as long as we know that this is only fancy, I

know of no holier occupation for the human mind than such cloud-gazing. But let us always recollect that the cloud which to us may seem shaped like a son of man, may seem to another to be backed like a weasel, and to another to be very like a whale. What, then,' Mr. Stockton added, 'can be a nobler study than the great book of Nature, or, as we used to call it, the works of God?'

'Pray do not think,' said Mr. Herbert, 'that I complain of this generation because it studies Nature. I complain of it because it does not study her. Yes,' he went on, as he saw Mr. Stockton start, 'you can analyse her in your test tubes, you can spy at her through your microscopes; but can you see her with your own eyes, or receive her into your own souls? You can tell us what she makes her wonders of, and how she makes them, and how long she takes about it. But you cannot tell us what these wonders are like when they are made. When God said, "Let there

be light, and light was, and God saw that it was good," was he thinking, as he saw this, of the exact velocity it travelled at, and of the exact laws it travelled by, which you wise men are at such infinite pains to discover ; or was he thinking of something else, which you take no pains to discover at all—of how it clothed the wings of the morning with silver, and the feathers of the evening with gold ? Is water, think you, a nobler thing to the modern chemist, who can tell you exactly what gases it is made of, and nothing more ; or to Turner who could not tell you at all what it is made of, but who did know and who could tell you what it is made—what it is made by the sunshine, and the cloud-shadow, and the storm-wind—who knew how it paused in the taintless mountain trout-pool, a living crystal over stones of flickering amber ; and how it broke itself turbid, with its choirs of turbulent thunder, when the rocks card it into foam, and where the tempest sifts it into

spray? When Pindar called water the best of things, was he thinking of it as the union of oxygen and hydrogen——'

'He would have been much wiser if he had been,' interposed Dr. Jenkinson. 'Thales, to whose theory, as you know, Pindar was referring——' But the Doctor's words were utterly unavailing to check the torrent of Mr. Herbert's eloquence. They only turned it into a slightly different course.

'Ah! masters of modern science,' he went on, 'you can tell us what pure water is made of; but, thanks to your drains and your mills, you cannot tell us where to find it. You can, no doubt, explain to us all about sunsets; but the smoke of your towns and your factories has made it impossible for us to see one. However, each generation is wise in its own wisdom; and ours would sooner look at a foetus in a bottle, than at a statue of the god Apollo, from the hand of Phidias, and in the air of Athens.'

During all this speech Mr. Storks had remained with his face buried in his hands, every now and then drawing in his breath through his teeth, as if he were in pain. When it was over he looked up, with a scared expression, as if he hardly knew where he was, and seemed quite unable to utter a syllable.

‘Of course,’ said Mr. Stockton, ‘mere science, as science, does not deal with moral right and wrong.’

‘No,’ said Mr. Saunders, ‘for it has shown that right and wrong are terms of a bygone age, connoting altogether false ideas. Mere automata as science shows we are—clockwork machines, wound up by meat and drink——’

‘As for that,’ broke in Mr. Storks, who had by this time recovered himself—and his weighty voice at once silenced Mr. Saunders, ‘I would advise our young friend not to be too confident. We may be automata, or we

may not. Science has not yet decided. And upon my word,' he said, striking the table, 'I don't myself care which we are. Supposing the Deity—if there be one—should offer to make me a machine, if I am not one, on condition that I should always go right, I, for one, would gladly close with the proposal.'

'But you forget,' said Allen, 'that in the moral sense there would be no going right at all, if there were not also the possibility of going wrong. If your watch keeps good time you don't call it virtuous, nor if it keeps bad time do you call it sinful.'

'Sin, Lord Allen,' said Mr. Storks, 'is a word that has helped to retard moral and social progress more than anything. Nothing is good or bad, but thinking makes it so; and the superstitious and morbid way in which a number of entirely innocent things have been banned as sin, has caused more than half the tragedies of the world. Science will establish an entirely new basis of

morality; and the sunlight of rational approbation will shine on many a thing, hitherto overshadowed by the curse of a hypothetical God.'

'Exactly so,' exclaimed Mr. Saunders eagerly. 'Now I'm not at all that sort of man myself,' he went on, 'so don't think because I say this.'

Everyone stared at Mr. Saunders in wonder as to what he could mean.

'We think it, for instance,' he said, 'a very sad thing when a girl is as we call it ruined. But it is we really that make all the sadness. She is ruined only because we think she is so. And I have little doubt that that high philosophy of the future that Mr. Storke speaks of will go far, some day, towards solving the great question of women's sphere of action by its recognition of prostitution as an honorable and beneficent profession.'

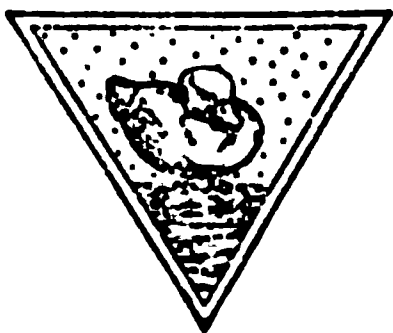
'Sir!' exclaimed Mr. Storke, striking the table, and glaring with indignation at Mr.

Saunders, 'I could hardly have believed that such misplaced flippancy——'

'Flippancy! it is reasoned truth,' shrieked Mr. Saunders, upsetting his wine-glass.

Luckily this brought about a pause. Laurence took advantage of it.

'See,' he said, 'Dr. Jenkinson has left us. Will no one have any more wine?—Then suppose we follow him.'





CHAPTER IV.

IT was a calm, lovely evening. The moon was rising over the sea, and the sea was slowly silvering under it. A soft breeze breathed gently, full of the scents of flowers ; and in the low sky of the west there yet lingered a tender peach-colour.

The ladies were sitting about on chairs, grouped together, but with several little groups within the group ; and amongst them all was Dr. Jenkinson, making himself particularly agreeable to Mrs. Sinclair. When the gentlemen emerged there was a general stir, and Lady Ambrose, shutting up a volume of St. Simon's Memoirs, said, ' Well,

Mr. Laurence, we have been talking most industriously about the future.'

Laurence was standing with Mr. Luke on the step of the dining-room window, and both were looking out gravely on the tranquil scene.

'Do you remember,' said Laurence, 'that it was here, three years ago, that you composed the lines that stand last in your published volumes?'

'I remember,' said Mr. Luke dreamily. 'What an evening that was!'

'I wish you would repeat them,' said Laurence.

'What is the good?' said Mr. Luke, 'why rouse again the voices that haunt

About the mouldered lodges of the past?'

'Mr. Luke,' said Lady Ambrose appealingly, 'I do so wish you would.'

'Is Mr. Luke going to recite poetry?' said Mrs. Sinclair, coming languidly up to them.

‘How delicious!’ She was looking lovely in the dim light, with a diamond star shining in her dark hair; and for a mortal bard there was positively no resisting her appeal.

Mr. Luke, with a silent composure pressed his hands for a moment against his forehead; he gave one hem; and then in a clear melodious voice began as follows:—

*‘Softly the evening descends,
Violet and soft. The sea
Adds to the silence, below
Pleasant and cool on the beach
Breaking; yes, and a breeze
Calm as the twilight itself
Furtively sighs through the dusk,
Listlessly lifting my hair,
Fanning my thought-wearied brow.*

*Thus I stand in the gloom
Watching the moon-track begin
Quivering to die like a dream
Over the far sea-line
To the unknown region beyond.*

*‘So for ages hath man
Gazed on the ocean of time
From the shores of his birth, and, turning
His eyes from the quays, the thronged*

*Marts, the noise and the din
To the far horizon, hath dreamed
Of a timeless country beyond.*

*Vainly, for how should he pass,
Being on foot, o'er the wet
Ways of the unplumbed waves?
How, without ship, should he pass
Over the shipless sea
To the timeless country beyond?*

*' Ah, but once—once long ago,
Came there a ship white-sailed
From the country beyond, with bright
Oarsmen, and men that sang;
Came to Humanity's coasts,
Called to the men on the shore,
Foyously touched at the port.*

*Then did time-weary man
Climb the bulwarks, the deck
Eagerly crowding. Anon
With jubilant voices raised,
And singing, " When Israel came
Out of Egypt," and whatso else
In the psalm is written, they passed
Out of the ken of the land,
Over the far sea-line,
To the unknown region beyond.*

*' Where are they now, then—they
That were borne out of sight by the ship—
Our brothers, of times gone by?
Why have they left us here*

*Solemn, dejected, alone,
Gathered in groups on the shore?
Why? For we, too, have gazed
O'er the waste of waters, and watched
For a sail as keenly as they.
Ah, wretched men that we are!
On our haggard faces and brows
Aching, a wild breeze fawns
Full of the scents of the sea,
Redolent of regions beyond.
Why, then, tarries the ship?
When will her white sail rise
Like a star on the sea-line? When?*

*'When?—And the answer comes
From the sailless face of the sea,
"Ah, rain watchers, what boots
The calm of the evening?
Have ye not watched through the day
Turbulent waves, the expanse
Endless, shaken with storm,
And ask ye where is the ship?
Deeper than plummet can dive
She is bedded deep in the ooze,
And over her tall mast floats
The purple plain of the calm."*

*'Yes—and never a ship
Since this is sunken, will come
Ever again o'er the waves—
Nay, not even the craft with the fierce*

*Steersman, him of the marsh
Livid, with wheels of flame
Circling his eyes, to smite
The lingering soul with his oar.
—Not that even. But we
Drop where we stand one by one
On the shingles and sands of time,
And cover in taciturn gloom,
With only perhaps some tear,
Each for his brother the hushed
Heart and the limitless dreams
With a little gift of sand.'*

'Thank you, Mr. Luke, so much,' said Lady Ambrose. 'How charming! I am always so fond of poems about the sea.'

'Ah,' said Mr. Luke, turning to Mrs. Sinclair, 'these are emotions scarcely worth describing.'

'Certainly not,' muttered Mr. Storks, half aloud as he moved off to discover Lady Grace.

Mr. Luke stood apart, and surveyed the party with a look of pensive pity. On Mr. Storks, however, whose last remark he had overheard, his eyes rested with an expression

somewhat more contemptuous. The brightening moonlight fell softly on the group before him, giving it a particularly picturesque effect, as it touched the many colours and folds of the ladies' dresses, and struck here and there a furtive flash from a gem on wrist or throat. The tranquil hour seemed to have a tranquillising effect on nearly everyone; and the conversation reached Mr. Luke's ears as a low murmur, broken only by the deep sound of Mr. Stork's voice, and the occasional high notes of Mr. Saunders, who seemed to Mr. Luke, in his present frame of mind, to be like a shrill cock, crowing to the world before the sunrise of universal philistinism.

Laurence meanwhile had caught Miss Merton's eyes looking at him with a grave regard; and this had brought him instantly to her side, when Mr. Luke had ended his recital.

'We didn't spare the times we live in,

to-night, did we ?' he said slowly to her in a low voice. ' Well, well—I wonder what it is all coming to—we and our times together ! We are certainly a curious medley here, all of us. I suppose no age but ours could have produced one like it—at least, let us hope so, for the credit of the ages in general.'

' I must say,' said Miss Merton, smiling, ' that you seem to take to the age very kindly, and to be very happy amongst your friends. But you did not tell us very much of what you thought yourself.'

' I don't often say what I think,' said Laurence, ' because I don't often know what I think ; but I know a great many things that I don't think ; and I confess I take a pleasure in saying these, and in hearing others say them ; so the society that I choose as a rule represents not the things I think I approve, but the things I am sure I repudiate.'

' I confess,' said Miss Merton, ' I don't quite understand that.'

‘Shall I tell you,’ said Laurence, ‘why I live so much in society—amongst my friends as you call them? Simply because I feel, in my life, as a child does in a dark room; and I must have some one to talk to, or else I think I should go mad. What one says is a little matter, so long as one makes a noise of some sort, and forgets the ghosts that in one’s heart one is shuddering at.’

Miss Merton was silent for a moment, and looked up into the sky in which the stars were now one by one appearing.

‘I suppose,’ she said presently, ‘you think it is a very poor affair—life’s whole business. And yet I don’t see why you should.’

‘Not see why I should?’ repeated Laurence. ‘Ah, that shows how little you, from your position, can sympathise with ours. I am not surprised at it. Of course, it is out of the question that you should. You, happy in some sustaining faith, can see a meaning in all life, and all life’s affections. You can endure

—you can even welcome its sorrows. The clouds of *ennui* themselves for you have silver linings. For your religion is a kind of philosopher's stone, turning whatever it touches into something precious. But we—we can only remember that for us too, things had a meaning once ; but they have it no longer. Life stares at us now, all blank and expressionless, like the eyes of a lost friend, who is not dead, but who has turned an idiot. Perhaps you never read Clough's Poems, did you ? Scarcely a day passes in which I do not echo to myself his words :—

Ah well-a-day, for we are souls bereaved !
Of all the creatures under heaven's wide cope,
We are most hopeless who had once most hope,
And most beliefless who had once believed.'

'And do you think,' said Miss Merton in a low tone, 'that belief in these days brings no painful perplexities too ? Do you think that we can look out on the state of the world now, and think about its future, without

anxiety? But really,' she went on, raising her voice, 'if I, like you, thought that Christianity was not true, I should not waste my time in lamenting over it. I should rather be glad that I had got free from a gigantic and awful imposition.'

'What!' exclaimed Laurence, 'should we rejoice at our old guide dropping dead amongst the mountains, even though he had lost his way; if so we are left hopeless, and without any guide at all?'

'You have your consciences,' said Miss Merton, with some decision in her voice; 'you surely don't mean to say that you have lost them?'

'As for our consciences,' said Leslie, who was standing close by, 'we revere them so much that we fancy they possess some power. But conscience, in most souls, is like an English Sovereign—it reigns, but it does not govern. Its function is merely to give a formal assent to the Bills passed by the passions; and

it knows, if it opposes what those are really bent upon, that ten to one it will be obliged to abdicate.'

'Let us hope that the constitutions of most souls are more stable than that,' said Miss Merton. 'As far as morality goes, I expect you have quite enough to guide you; and if you think religion false, I don't see why its loss should trouble you. And life itself, remember, has plenty of pleasures. It is full of things worth living for.'

'Is it?' exclaimed Leslie with sudden emphasis, and he looked into Miss Merton's face with an expression half absent and half wondering. 'Is there anything in life that you really think is, for its own sake, worth living for? To me it seems that we are haunted with the power of imagining that there might be, and are pursued with the knowledge that there never is. Look at that lovely water before us, with its floods of moonlight—how it ripples, how it sparkles away

into the distance! What happiness sights like these suggest to one. How happy they might make us—might, but they never do. They only madden us with a vague pain, that is like the sense of something lost for ever.'

'Still,' said Miss Merton, 'life is not all moonlight. Surely friendship and affection are worth having.'

'Let me beg you, Miss Merton,' said Leslie, replying to her tone rather than to her words, 'not to think that I am always pining and bemoaning myself. Fortunately the deeper part of one's nature will often go to sleep, and then the surface can enjoy itself. We can even laugh with our lips at the very things that our hearts in silence are breaking for. But as for happiness, that is always like prophecy, it is only fulfilled in the future; or else it is a miracle—it only exists in the past. The actual things we wish for we may very likely get, but they always come too late or too soon. When the boy is in love, he tries

to feel like a man ; when the man is in love, he tries to feel like a boy ; and both in vain.'

'Ah,' exclaimed Laurence, 'I think very differently from that. I know,' he said, turning to Miss Merton, 'that friendship and affection are things worth having, and if only pain and anxiety would leave me, I could enjoy the taste of happiness.'

'Could you?' said Leslie. 'When I look at what we are and what the world is, I can fancy no more melancholy spectacle than a happy man ; though I admit,' he added as he moved slowly away, 'that there is none more amusing than a man who tries to be melancholy.'

'Leslie is oddly changed,' said Laurence, 'since I saw him last. *I* am distressed with life because I cannot find out its worth. *He* is indignant at it, it seems, because he thinks he has found out its worthlessness. And yet—I envy him his temperament. He never lets any melancholy subdue him. He can always

laugh it down in a moment ; and he will trample bravely on any of his sentiments if he is on the road to anything he is proud of aiming at.'

Laurence was silent for a moment, and then said abruptly :—

' I dare say you think me very morbid ; but perhaps you can hardly realise the intense restless misery that a man endures when he can find nothing to do which he really feels worth doing. Could I only find some one thing—one great cause to labour for—one great idea—I could devote my whole self to it, and be happy : for labour, after all, is the only thing that never palls on a man. But such a cause, such an idea—I can find it nowhere. Politics have turned into a petty, weary game ; religion is dead. Our new prophets only offer us Humanity, in place of the God of which they have deprived us. And Humanity makes a very poor Deity, since it is every day disgracing itself and is never of the same mind from

one week's end to another. And so here I am utterly alone—friendless, and with nothing to help me; feeling that, were it not for the petty contemptible interests I manufacture for myself from day to day, life would be quite unbearable.'

'And yet,' said Miss Merton, 'you have much to make you happy—much that you would be sorry to lose.'

'I have a certain position,' said Laurence, 'and a certain amount of wealth, and I would not willingly lose anything of either of these; but that is not because, in my heart, I value them; but because, if I lost them, I might in my heart cease to despise them.'

'Surely,' said Miss Merton, 'there is a better way of looking at the matter. You came into the world with all your lower ambitions satisfied for you. The ground therefore is quite clear for the higher ambitions. That is why I think an aristocracy, as a rule, must always be the best governors of men,

for their ambitions, as a rule, are the only genuine ones. Think, too, what an advantage mere wealth is. The highest labour will never produce money, but generally requires it.'

'That is just the difficulty,' said Laurence. 'What shall I labour for? I am almost maddened sometimes, as I sit all the day idle and seem to hear the hateful wasted moments slipping away from me. And I *could* do something, I am sure. I feel I have powers.'

'I think,' said Miss Merton, 'that all I should say to you is, find something to do. The power to find or make an object is, I think, a great part of genius. However,' she said, with some sympathy in her voice, 'if you are in difficulties, I am sure I wish I could help you.'

'Well,' said Laurence in a subdued voice. 'I'm sure I beg your pardon for my egoism. I never talked so long about myself in my whole life before; and I promise never to do so again.'

Leslie meanwhile had moved away towards Mrs. Sinclair, who, looking particularly fascinating, was still commanding the attentions of Dr. Jenkinson. The Doctor was standing by her, all deferent gallantry, and, to Leslie's surprise, was saying something to her about Sappho.

'And now,' said Mrs. Sinclair, with a little appealing dainty smile, 'I want to ask you something about the Greek Anthology too. I can't read much Greek myself: but a gentleman who used to be rather kind to me, translated me a good deal of Greek poetry, once upon a time—when my husband,' she said, with a little shrug of the shoulders, 'used to go to sleep after his dinner.'

Dr. Jenkinson here glanced suspiciously at Mrs. Sinclair.

'Now what I want you to tell me,' she said, 'is something about some little—ahem—little love-songs, I think they were—*έρωτικ-*

something or other—I really can't pronounce the name.'

The Doctor started.

'And, Dr. Jenkinson, please,' Mrs. Sinclair went on in a voice of plaintive innocence, 'not to think me a terrible blue-stocking, because I ask you these questions; for I really hardly know any Greek myself—except perhaps a verse or two of the New Testament; and that's not very good Greek, I believe, is it? But the gentleman who translated so much to me, when he came to these little poems I speak of, was continually, though he was a very good scholar, quite unable to translate them. Now why should that have been, I want to know? Are Greek love-poems very hard?'

'Well,' said the Doctor, stammering, yet re-assured by Mrs. Sinclair's manner, 'they were probably—your friend perhaps—well—they were a little obscure perhaps—much Greek is—or——'

‘Corrupt?’ suggested Mrs. Sinclair naïvely.

The word was a simple one: but it sufficed to work a miracle on Dr. Jenkinson. For the first time in his life to a lady who united the two charms of beauty and fashion, to both of which he was eminently susceptible, Dr. Jenkinson was rude. He turned abruptly away, and staring hard at the moon, not at Mrs. Sinclair, said simply ‘I don’t know,’ with the most chilling intonation of which those words are capable. He then moved a pace away, and sat down on a chair close to Miss Merton.

Mrs. Sinclair turned to Leslie, with a flash in her eyes of soft suppressed laughter.

‘How lovely the evening is!’ murmured Leslie responding to the smile.

‘Yes,’ said Mrs. Sinclair looking out dreamily over the sea, ‘it almost realises one’s idea of perfect beauty.’

‘Really, Mrs. Sinclair,’ said Leslie, ‘you

are certainly most Hellenic. First you talk of Sappho, now of Ideas of Beauty. Are you a Platonist ?'

'Mr. Leslie, of course I am,' said Mrs. Sinclair, somewhat misapprehending his meaning. 'I never heard such an impertinent question. Platonism, however, is a very rare philosophy in these days, I'm afraid.'

'Ah, and so you too think we are all of us very bad, do you ?' said Leslie. 'It may be so, of course ; and yet men at least, often generalise very hastily, and very wrongly, I am sure. How often, for instance, do we say that all wives nowadays are inconstant, simply because such are the only ones we remember, not because they are the only ones we know.'

This speech was quite in Mrs. Sinclair's own manner, and she looked at Leslie with a smile of appreciation half humorous and half sentimental.

'Ah,' she began to say, in a voice that

had just a touch of sadness in it, 'if we could but all of us love only when we ought, and where we ought—' But here she paused. Her voice died away, and she leaned her head upon her hand in silence.

Leslie was going to have spoken; but he was suddenly arrested by the sound of Dr. Jenkinson, close beside him, talking to Miss Merton in a tone of unusual earnestness.

'I don't wonder,' he was saying, 'that you should feel in perplexity sometimes; whichever way we look at things there will be perplexities. But there is such a thing as goodness; and goodness in the end must triumph, and so in this large faith let us rest.'

'And,' said Donald Gordon in his soft deferential voice, which always sounded as if he was saying something deeply devotional, 'don't you think it is a higher thing to be good for good's own sake than for God's? and, whatever men may believe about having

another life, and a beautiful heaven, with gold streets, and with jewelled fortifications, don't you think that morality really is after all its own reward ?'

'But what of those poor people,' said Miss Merton, 'who cannot be moral—whom circumstances have kept from being ever anything but brutalised ? I dare say,' she said, turning to the Doctor, quite forgetting his sacred character, 'that I shall hardly be able to make you understand such a notion as that of living for God's glory. But still, if there be not a God for whose glory we can live, and who in his turn will not leave us all to ourselves, what then ? Think of all those who, in spite of hard surroundings, have just had strength enough to struggle to be good, but to struggle only—whose whole moral being has been left writhing in the road of life, like an animal that a cart-wheel has gone over, just lifting its eyes up with a piteous appeal at us who will not help it——'

Miss Merton looked at Dr. Jenkinson and paused. The moon shone tenderly on his silver hair, and his keen eyes had something very like moisture in them.

‘Yes,’ he said; ‘these are great, great difficulties. But there is another life in store for us—another life, and a God. And don’t think that the world is growing to disbelieve in these. Remember how many intelligent laymen count themselves members of the Church of England, simply because they believe in these two doctrines.’

‘It has always been inexplicable to me,’ said Mr. Storks, who had been attracted by the sound of the Doctor’s voice, ‘whence this longing for a future life could have arisen. I suppose there are few things the very possibility of which science so conclusively disproves.’

‘And yet,’ said Laurence, who had been speaking for a moment to Mrs. Sinclair, ‘I can’t help thinking at certain times that there

may be a whole world of things undreamed of by our scientific philosophy. Such a feeling is touched by the sight of an "Ora pro animâ meâ," or a "Resurgam," on a quiet tombstone, or the sign of the cross made by a mother in hope and in sorrow on the forehead of her dead child.'

Miss Merton looked at Laurence with some wonder in her large expressive eyes, Mr. Storks snorted, and Dr. Jenkinson blinked.

'See,' said Donald Gordon, 'the moonlight grows brighter and brighter every moment. It is almost bewildering in its dazzling paleness.'

'And there,' said Laurence, 'do you catch it?—that is the light-ship on the horizon, like a large low star.'

Laurence seated himself on the balustrade, and, leaning on his elbow, looked up into the clear hollow skies.

'World upon world,' he exclaimed at last,

‘and each one crowded, very likely, with beings like ourselves, wondering what this whole great universe is!’

‘And the vast majority of them believing in a wise and just God,’ said Leslie, ‘for I see no reason why ours should be the stupidest world in all creation.’

‘Yes,’ said Laurence, ‘and in each world a small select band, that has pierced through such a husk of lies, and has discovered the all-golden truth, that the universe is aimless, and that for good and evil the end is all one.’

Dr. Jenkinson had a sensible horror of the stars : and as soon as they were mentioned, he turned round in his chair, giving his back to the group, Miss Merton included, whilst Mr. Storks walked away, not without dignity.

‘Mrs. Sinclair is going to sing in a moment,’ said Laurence ; ‘some one is gone to fetch her guitar.’

'Hush!' exclaimed Miss Merton, 'do just listen to this.'

'Good gracious!' said Laurence in a whisper, 'Mr. Storks is at my aunt at last.'

Mr. Storks had been watching ever since dinner for an opportunity of discussing with Lady Grace the true position of woman, as settled by modern science. He was peculiarly full of this subject just now, having received only that morning a letter from a celebrated American physician, who stated very strongly as his opinion, that the strain of what is called the higher education was most prejudicial to the functions of maternity, and that the rights of woman might very probably be fatal to the existence of man. As soon as he got hold of Lady Grace, he led up to this point with startling rapidity; having been perfectly charmed at starting to find that she fully agreed with him that the prejudices of the present day were doing

more harm to woman's true interests than anything else.

'It is a pleasure,' said Mr. Storks, 'to discuss these matters with a person so thoroughly enlightened as yourself. You will of course see from what Dr. Boston says how entirely suicidal is the scheme of turning woman into a female man. Nature has marked out her mission for her plainly enough; and so our old friend Milton was right in his meaning after all, when he says that man is made for God, and woman for God through him, though of course the expression is antiquated.'

'Surely,' said Lady Grace with animation, 'not only the expression is antiquated, but the meaning also is contrary to all true fairness and enlightenment.'

'I confess, I don't see that,' said Mr. Storks with a look of smiling deference.

'What!' cried Lady Grace, 'is it not contrary to reason—let me put it to your own

candour—for a man who knows that his wife, ages hence, will be a seraph singing before the throne of God, to consider her only made for God through him—to consider her, indeed, as a thing made simply for her husband's use ?'

This answer of Lady Grace's took Mr. Storks quite aback. He knew not how to comport himself. His jaw fell—he stared—he said nothing. He felt as though he had been assassinated. But luckily at this very moment, liquid and clear, and exquisitely modulated, were heard the sounds of Mrs. Sinclair's voice, singing the following song—

*Darling, can you endure the liquid weather,
The jasmine-scented twilights, oh my dear ?
Or do you still remember how together
We read the sad sweet Idyll 'Guinevere,'
Love, in one last year's twilight ?
Galeotto fu il libro, e chi lo scrisse.¹*

¹ Dante, Inferno, v. 137.

*Ah, the flowers smelt sweet, and all unheeding
Did I read to you that tender tale,
Oh my love, until my voice, in reading
How those lovers greeted 'passion-pale,'
Trembled in the soft twilight.*
Galeotto fu il libro, e chi lo scrisse.

*Then our eyes met, and then all was over—
All the world receded cold and far;
And your lips were on my lips, my lover;
And above us shone a silver star,
Through depths of melting twilight.*
Galeotto fu il libro, e chi lo scrisse.

*Darling, no Fuly will ever find us
On this earth, together, more. Our fates
Were but a moment cheated. Then, behind us
Shrilled his voice for whom Caina¹ waits,
Shattering our one sweet twilight.*
Galeotto fu il libro, e chi lo scrisse.

*I shall know no more of summer weather,
Nought will be for me of glad or fair,
Till I join my darling, and together
We go for ever on the accursed air,²
There in the dawnless twilight.*
Galeotto fu il libro, e chi lo scrisse.

'What a lovely voice!' said Laurence to

¹ Dante, Inferno, v. 107.

² Ibid. v. 31.

Miss Merton. 'I wonder how she will sound singing before the throne.'

'She will be obliged to take lessons in a rather different style,' said Miss Merton, unable to suppress a smile; and then she suddenly checked herself, and looked grave. 'Mrs. Sinclair has always interested me,' she said. 'I often come across her in London, but I hardly know her.'

'Mr. Laurence,' said Mrs. Sinclair, 'you must now make Mr. Leslie sing, for I discover that he can play the guitar too.'

Leslie was of course pressed, and with some reluctance consented.

'I suppose,' he said, 'we are all of us more or less moon-struck to-night, so I had best sing the silliest thing I know; and as I don't think anything can be sillier than a song I once wrote myself, I will sing that.'

He touched a few chords carelessly, and yet with the manner of a practised player; paused for a moment, and then again striking

the instrument began to sing. He was watched at first with merely a languid curiosity; and Miss Prattle whispered to Lady Ambrose that his attitude was very affected; but curiosity and criticism were both lost in surprise at the first sound of his rich and flexible voice, and still more so at the real passion which he breathed into the following words, rude and artless as they were :—

*Oh, her cheek, her cheek was pale,
Her voice was hardly musical;
But your proud grey eyes grew tender,
Child, when mine they met,
With a piteous self-surrender,
Margaret.*

*Child, what have I done to thee?
Child, what hast thou done to me?
How you froze me with your tone
That last day we met!
Your sad eyes then were cold as stone,
Margaret.*

*Oh, it all now seems to me
A far-off weary mystery!*

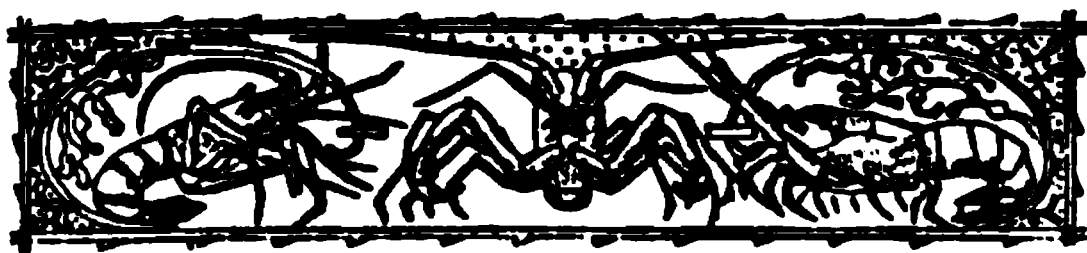
*Yet—and yet, her last sad frown
Awees me still, and yet—
In vain I laugh your memory down,
Margaret.*

Leslie received loud thanks from many voices, especially from Lady Ambrose. Some, however, were almost silent from surprise at the feeling, which he seemed quite unconsciously to have betrayed. Mrs. Sinclair held out her hand to him, when no one was looking, and said quietly, 'Thank you so much, I can't tell you how I like your song.'

'Well,' said Laurence, as the party moved indoors into the lighted drawing-room, 'we have been all of us very sentimental to-night, and if we can't get better now, I hope we shall sleep it off, and wake up well and sane to-morrow morning.'

The following being Sunday there arose some vague mention of church. The nearest church however was some miles distant, and a rumour arose amongst the guests that Dr. Jenkinson would perform the service and preach a sermon in the private chapel.

BOOK II.



CHAPTER I.

IN the following morning Lady Ambrose awoke somewhat out of spirits. Last night, whilst her maid was brushing her hair, she had pondered deeply over much that she had heard during the evening ; and her thoughts having been once started in such a direction, the conviction quickly dawned upon her that the world was indeed becoming very bad, and that society was on the point of dissolution. This was quite a new view of things to her, and it had all the charm of novelty. Still, however, she would probably have found by the morn-

ing that she had successfully slept it off, if the post had not failed to bring her an invitation to the Duchess of ——'s garden-party at —— House, which she was expecting with some anxiety. As it was, therefore, her spirits failed to recover themselves, and whilst she was being dressed her thoughts wandered wistfully away to the promised morning service in the chapel. At breakfast, however, another blow awaited her. How a private chapel had come to be mentioned last evening was not clear. Certainly there was no such appendage to Laurence's villa, and the susceptibilities of Lady Ambrose received a severe shock, as she learnt that the ministrations of Dr. Jenkinson, the comfort of which she was looking forward to, were to take place in the theatre which adjoined the house. She bore up, however, like a brave woman, and resolving that nothing, on her part at least, should be wanting, she appeared shortly before eleven o'clock, in full Sunday

costume, with her bonnet, and her books of devotion.

Mrs. Sinclair looked at her in dismay. 'I had thought,' she said plaintively to Laurence, 'that as this was only a morning performance, I need not make a toilette. And as for a prayer-book, why, dear Mr. Laurence, I have not had one since I was confirmed.'

'Not when you were married?' said Leslie.

'Perhaps,' said Mrs. Sinclair pensively, 'but I have forgotten all about that——now.'

At this moment the gong sounded, and the whole party, Lady Ambrose and her bonnet amongst them, adjourned to the place of worship, which was connected with the house by a long corridor.

When the party entered they found themselves in a complete miniature theatre, with the gas, as there were no windows, fully burning. It had been arranged beforehand that

the guests should occupy the boxes, the gallery being appropriated to the servants, whilst the stalls were to remain completely empty. The congregation entered with great decorum and gradually settled themselves in their places with a subdued whispering. Lady Ambrose buried her face in her hands for a few moments, and several of the younger ladies followed her example. Everyone then looked about them silently, in suspense and expectation. The scene that met their eyes was certainly not devotional. The whole little semicircle glittered with heavy gilding and with hangings of crimson satin, and against these the stucco limbs of a number of gods and goddesses gleamed pale and prominent. The gallery rested on the heads of nine scantily-draped Muses, who, had they been two less in number, might have passed for the seven deadly sins; round the frieze in high relief reeled a long procession of Fauns and Bacchanals; and half the harem

of Olympus sprawled and floated on the azure ceiling. Nor was this all. The curtain was down ; and brilliantly illuminated as it was, displayed before the eyes of the congregation Faust on the Brocken, with a long plume, dancing with the young witch, who could boast of no costume at all. The scene was so strange that everyone forgot to whisper or even to smile. There was a complete silence, and the eyes of all were soon fixed upon the curtain in wonder and expectation.

Presently a sound was heard. A door opened, and Dr. Jenkinson, in his ordinary dress, entered the stalls. He looked deliberately round him for a moment, as though he were taking stock of those present ; then, selecting the central stall as a kind of *prie-Dieu*, he knelt down facing his congregation, and after a moment's pause began to read the service in a simple, earnest voice. Lady Ambrose, however, though she knew her prayer-book as well as most women, could

not for the life of her find the place. The reason was not far to seek. The Doctor had begun with the following passage from the Koran, which he had once designed to use in Westminster Abbey as the text of a missionary sermon.

‘Be constant in prayer,’ he began, in a voice tremulous with emotion, ‘and give alms: and what good ye have sent before for your souls, ye shall find it with God. Surely God seeth that which ye do. They say, Verily none shall see Paradise except they be Jews or Christians. This is their wish. Say ye, Produce your proof of this if ye speak truth. Nay, but he who resigneth himself to God, and doeth that which is right, he shall have his reward with his Lord; there shall come no fear on them, neither shall they be grieved.’¹

Dr. Jenkinson then went on to the Con-

¹ Koran. chap. ii. Sale’s Translation.

fession, the Absolution, and a number of other selections from the English morning service, omitting, however, the creed, and concluded the whole with a short prayer of St. Francis Xavier's.

But it was discovered that his voice, unless he made an effort, was unhappily only partly audible from the position which he occupied ; and Laurence, as soon as the Liturgy was over, went softly up to him to apprise him of the fact. Dr. Jenkinson was very grateful for being thus told in time. It was fortunate, he said, that the prayers only had been missed ; the question was, where should he go for the sermon. Laurence in a diffident manner proposed the stage ; but the Doctor accepted the proposal with great alacrity, and Laurence went immediately out with him to conduct him to his new pulpit. In a few moments the curtain was observed to twitch and tremble ; two or three abortive pulls were evidently being made ; and at last Faust

and the young witch rapidly rolled up, and discovered first the feet and legs, and then the entire person of Doctor Jenkinson standing in the middle of a gorge in the Indian Caucasus—the remains of a presentation of Prometheus Bound which had taken place last February.

The Doctor was not a man to be abashed by incongruities. He looked about him for a moment: he slightly raised his eyebrows, and then, without the least discomposure, and in a clear incisive voice, began:—

‘In the tenth verse of the hundred and eleventh Psalm, it is said, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” ‘The fear of the Lord,’ he again repeated, more slowly, and with more emphasis, surveying the theatre as he spoke, ‘is the beginning of wisdom.’

He then made a long pause, looking down at his feet, as if, although he held his sermon-book in his hand, he were considering how to

begin. As he stood there silent, the footlights shining brightly on his silver hair, Lady Ambrose had full time to verify the text in her prayer-book. At last the Doctor suddenly raised his head, and with a gentle smile of benignity playing on his lips, shook open his manuscript, and thus proceeded :—

' The main difficulty that occupied the early Greek Philosophers, as soon as philosophy in its proper sense can be said to have begun, was the great dualism that seemed to run through all things. Matter and mind, the presence of imperfection, and the idea of perfection, or the unity and plurality of being, were amongst the various forms in which the two contradictory elements of things were presented to them, as demanding reconciliation or explanation. This manner of viewing things comes to a head, so to speak, amongst the ancients, in the system of Plato. With him the sensible and the intelligible worlds stand separated by a great gulf, the one containing all good, the

other of itself only evil, until we recognise its relation to the good, and see that it is only a shadow and a type of it. The world of real existence is something outside, and virtually unconnected with, this world of mere phenomena; and the Platonic prayer is that we should be taken out of the world, rather than, as Christ says, with a fuller wisdom, that we should be delivered from the evil.

'Plato had, however, by thus dwelling on this antagonism in things, paved the way for a reconciliation—some say he even himself began it. At any rate, it was through him that it was nearly, if not quite, accomplished by his disciple Aristotle. Aristotle first systematised the great principle of evolution, and transformed what had appeared to former thinkers as the dualism of mind and matter into a single scale of ascending existences. Thus what Plato had conceived of as two worlds, were now presented as opposite poles of the same. The πρώτη ὕλη, the world "without form and void,"

receiving form, at length culminated in the soul of man ; and in the soul of man sensation at length culminated in pure thought.' A slight cough here escaped from Mrs. Sinclair. ' *You will perhaps think,*' the Doctor went on, ' *that a sermon is not the place in which to discuss such differences of secular opinion ; or you will perhaps think that such differences are of no very great moment. But if you look under the surface, and at the inner meaning of them, you will find that they bear upon questions which are, or ought to be, of the very highest moment to each of us—questions indeed,*' the Doctor added, suddenly lowering his manuscript for a moment, and looking sharply round at his audience, ' *which we all of us here have very lately—very lately indeed—either discussed ourselves, or heard discussed by others.'* This produced an immediate sensation, especially amongst the feminine part of the listeners, to whom the discourse thus far had seemed strange, rather than significant. ' *The*

question,' the doctor continued, 'is one of the relations of the spiritual to the natural; and the opposition between the views of these two ancient philosophers is by no means obsolete in our own century. There is even now far too prevalent a tendency to look upon the spiritual as something transcending and completely separate from the natural; and there is in the minds of many well-meaning and earnest persons a sort of alarm felt at any attempt to bring the two into connection. This feeling is experienced not by Christians only, but by a large number of their opponents. There is, for instance, no doctrine more often selected for attack by those who oppose Christianity upon moral grounds, than that of which my text is an expression, I mean the doctrine of a morality enforced by rewards and punishments. Such morality, we hear it continually urged by men who set themselves up as advanced thinkers, is no morality at all. No action can be good, they tell us, that does not spring from the love

of good. Virtue is no longer virtue if it springs from fear. The very essence of it is to spring from freedom. Now, these arguments, though specious at the first blush of the thing, are really, if we look them honestly in the face, to the utmost shallow and unphilosophical. They are really but so many denials of the great doctrine of evolution—so many attempts to set up again that absolute antagonism between good and evil which it has been the aim of all the higher thinkers, and of Christ himself, to do away with. If, then, these modern critics of Christianity come to us with such objections, let us not try to disguise the truth that the morality of our religion is based on fear. Let us rather boldly avow this, and try to point out to them that it is they, and not the Psalmist, that are out of harmony with modern thought. For what is it that the sacred Scripture says? "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." The beginning, you will please to observe—the beginning only. It

is not perfect wisdom, it is not perfect virtue; but it is the beginning of both of these. It is, if I may be allowed the expression, the moral protoplasm—it is that out of which they are both evolved. It is, as Aristotle would call it, their potentiality. The actuality is different from the potentiality; for "perfect love," as St. John says, "casteth out fear." Putting together, then, the ideas of these two good men, St. John and Aristotle, we may say that the love of God—that is, true wisdom—is the actuality of the fear of Him.

'This account of the origin of the true wisdom may not, indeed, be applicable to each individual case. Some persons'—the doctor's voice here grew very soft, and seemed as though it would almost break with feeling—'some persons may have been so fortunate as to have received the truest wisdom into their hearts by education, almost with their mother's milk. But there are those not so fortunate, who may have needed the discipline of a godly

fear to lead them upwards from a "wallowing in the sensual sty," towards the higher life. And just as this is true of many of us individually, so it is still more deeply true of the human race as a whole. All study of history, and of social science, and of philosophy, is teaching this to us every day with increasing clearness. The human race, as soon as it became human, feared God before it loved Him. Its fear, as the Scripture puts it, was the beginning of its wisdom; or as modern thought has put it, in slightly different words, the love of justice sprang out of the fear of suffering injustice. Thus the end is different from the beginning, and yet springs out of it. Ethics, as it has been well said, are the finest fruits of humanity, but they are not its roots. Our reverence for truth, all our sacred family ties, and the purest and most exalted forms of matrimonial attachment, have each their respective origins in self-interest, self-preservation, and animal appetite.

' There is, I admit, in this truth something that may at first sight repel us, and perhaps even prompt some of us to deny indignantly that it is a truth at all. But this is really a cowardly and unworthy feeling, fatal to any true comprehension of God's dealings with man, and arising from a quite mistaken conception of our own dignity, and our own connection with God. It is some such mistaken conception as this that sets so many of us against the discoveries of modern science as to the origin of our own species, and, what is far worse, prompts us to oppose such discoveries with dishonest objections. How is it possible, some of us ask, that man with his sublime conceptions of duty and of God, and his fine apparatus of reason, and so forth, should be produced by any process of evolution from a beastly and irrational ape? But to ask such questions as these is really to call in question the power of God, and so to do Him dishonour. It is true that we cannot trace out, as yet, all the

steps of this wonderful evolution ; but let us not be found, like doubting Thomas, resolved not to believe until we have actually seen. And yet, if our faith does indeed require strengthening, we have only to look a little more attentively at the commonest facts before us. For is it not, let me ask you—to take, for instance, a man's sublime faculty of reasoning and logical comprehension—far more wonderful that a reasoning man should have the same parents as a woman, than that they both should have the same parents as a monkey? Science and religion both alike teach us that with God all things are possible.

' I just touch in passing upon this doctrine that we popularly call Darwinism, because it is the most familiar example to us of the doctrine of evolution. But the point which I am wishing to emphasize is not the outward evolution of man, but the inward, of which, however, the former is an image and a likeness. This theory of moral evolution I wish to point out

to you, is alike the Christian and the scientific theory; and I thus wish you to see that the very points in which science seems most opposed to Christianity are really those in which it most fundamentally agrees with it. I will therefore just ask you to notice how foolish and short-sighted those persons are who think that a great result is lessened if it can be proved to have had small beginnings. Is a state less truly a state because we know that it has sprung out of the germ of the family? Surely not. Neither is man less truly man if he have sprung from an ape; nor is love less truly love if it has sprung from fear.

And so now, since we have seen how science and Christianity are at one as to the rise of the moral sentiments, I will pass on to a wider point, the character and the history of Christianity itself, both of which have been misunderstood and misinterpreted for at least eighteen hundred years; and when I have pointed out how this great subject is being now explained

by the methods of modern science, I will pass on to an issue that is wider yet.

'The world has hitherto failed to understand Christianity, because it studied it upon a false method—a method based upon that old dualistic theory of things of which I have already spoken. Just as Plato looked upon mind as entirely distinct from matter, so used Christians to look upon things sacred as entirely distinct from things secular. But now this middle wall of partition is being broken down by science, and by scientific criticism, and by a wider view of things in general. The primary way in which all this has affected Christianity, is by the new spirit in which it has led us to study the Bible. We used to look upon the Bible as a book standing apart by itself, and to be interpreted by a peculiar canon of criticism. But we have now learnt that it is to be studied just like all other books: and we are now for the first time coming to

understand what, in its true grandeur, a real revelation is. We are learning, in fact, that just as no single scripture "is of any private interpretation;" still less is the entire body of the Scriptures. They, too, must be interpreted by their context. We must inquire into their origin; we must ask diligently under what circumstances they were written and edited, and for what ends. Nor must we ever again fall into such quaint and simple mistakes as did commentators like Origen, or Augustine, or Tertullian, or even Paul himself, whose discoveries of Messianic prophecies in writings like the Psalms for instance, are really much the same as would be a discovery on our part in Mr. Tennyson's line on the death of the Duke of Wellington, "The last great Englishman is low," a prophecy of the late Chancellor of the Exchequer. But to understand the meaning of any text, we must try to see what from his position and education, the writer could have meant by it; not what this or that Father,

living long afterwards, fancied that he meant. Our motto in religion, as in science, should be, "Vere scire est per causas scire."

'If we study Christianity reverently and carefully upon these principles, we shall see that it was not a thing that sprang up, as we used to fancy, without any human antecedents, but that its roots reach back with many ramifications into the western and oriental thought of preceding centuries. We shall see how it absorbed into itself all that was highest in Hebraistic Theism and in Hellenic thought—something too, let us admit, of the failings of both. I cannot here enter into any of the details of this, what may be truly termed pre-Christian Christianity. I can only briefly point out its existence, and its double origin, commenting on these by the following few lines from a great German writer. "The yearning after a higher revelation," he tells us, "was the universal characteristic of the last centuries of the ancient world. This was in the first

place but a consciousness of the decline of the classical nations and their culture, and the presentiment of the approach of a new era; and it called into life not only Christianity, but also, and before it, Pagan and Jewish Alexandrianism, and other related developments."

'This, then, is the great point to be borne in mind—viz. that God had been preparing the way for the coming of Christ long before he sent "Elias, which was for to be." Neither John Baptist, no, nor One greater than John, was left by God (as the children of Israel were left by Pharaoh) to gather straw himself to make bricks. The materials were all prepared ready to their hands by their Heavenly Father. And so, let us be especially and prayerfully on our guard against considering Christianity as having come into the world at once, ready-made, so to speak, by our Saviour, as a body of theological doctrines. Any honest study of history will show us that the Apostles received no such

system ; that our Lord Himself never made any claim to the various characters with which subsequent thought invested Him ; and that to attribute such claims to Him would be an anachronism, of which He would Himself have scarcely understood the meaning. If we only clear our eyes of any false theological glamour, a very slight study of the inspired writers will at once show us this. We shall see how uncertain and shifting at first everything was. We shall see what a variety of conflicting opinions the early Church entertained even upon the most fundamental subjects—such, for instance, as the identity of the God of the Old Testament with the God of the New, which was denied by a large number of the early Christians : we shall see how widely divergent were the systems of Jewish and Pauline Christianity, and how discrepant and tentative are the accounts given by St. Paul and by the author of the Fourth Gospel of the mystical nature of Christ, whom they tried to

identify with different mysterious potencies supposed by the Jewish-Alexandrian philosophers to be coexistent with God. And if we pursue the history of the Church a little farther, we shall find many more things to startle us. We shall find, for instance, the most renowned apologist of early Catholic times, a materialist, holding the materiality not of the soul of man only, but of God also. "Nihil enim"—these are this father's words—"si non corpus. Omne quod est, corpus est." Thus we see,' said the Doctor cheerfully, looking round him with a smile of benignant triumph, and blinking with his eyes, 'that difference of opinion about the dogmas of religion is nothing new. It existed in the Jewish Church; the phenomenon was only prolonged by Christianity. Later Judaism and primitive Christianity were both made up of a variety of systems, all honestly and boldly thought out, differing widely from each other, and called by the honourable appellation of heresies: and of these, let me remind

you, it is the glory of the Church of England to be composed likewise.

'Nor is this all,' he went on in a softer and more appealing tone; 'not only are all these things so confused and doubtful; but we now see that, in the face of recent criticism, we cannot even be quite sure about any of the details of the divine life of our Lord. But in all this'—the Doctor's voice here became still more ærial, and he fixed his eyes upon the painted ceiling of the theatre, as though he were gazing on some glorious vision—'in all this there is nothing to discompose us. We can be quite sure that He lived, and that He went about doing good, and that in him we have, in the highest sense, everlasting life.

'Let us then no longer fight against the conclusions of science and of criticism, but rather see in them the hand of God driving us, even against our will, away from beliefs and teachings that are not really those of His son. If we do not do this—if we persist in identify-

ing the false Christianity with the true—the false, when it is at last plucked rudely away from us, as it must be, will carry away a part of the true with it. And as long as we are in this state of mind, we are never for a moment safe. We can never open a philological review, or hear of a scientific experiment, without trembling. Witness the discussions now engaging so much public attention on the subject of animal automatism, and the marvellous results which experiments on living subjects have of late days revealed to us; a frog with half a brain having destroyed more theology than all the doctors of the Church with their whole brains can ever build up again. Thus does God choose the "weak things of this world to confound the wise." Seeing then, that this is the state of the case, we should surely learn henceforth not to identify Christianity with anything that science can assail, or even question. Let us say rather that nothing is or can be essential to the religion of Christ which,

when once stated, can be denied without absurdity. If we can only attain to this conception, we shall see truly that this our faith is indeed one "that no man taketh away from us."

'If we be thus once "stablished in the faith," all human history, and the history of Christianity especially, will assume for us a new sacredness and a new significance. We shall recognise gladly its long struggles of growth, and its struggles for existence, and see how in all these were at work the great principles of evolution. We shall see how Christian perfection emerged gradually out of imperfection—nay, that it was only through imperfection that this perfection was possible. For although, as we now know, all the various theological systems that have sprung up about Christianity, and have been so long current, are not Christianity, are most of them, indeed, not even sense—yet it was through these that true Christianity made its way, and extended itself in a corrupt and ignorant world. For

the world has been given from age to age just so much of the truth as it has been able to bear, and it is only, let us remember, from receiving it tempered in this wise proportion, that it has been able to receive it at all. But these times of the world's probation are now passing away. It is now at length ceasing to be under "tutors and governors;" it is learning to "put away childish things." It is coming to a sense that it is now fitted to receive Christ's truth pure, and without any admixture or wrappage of falsehood. And so, as it looks back over all the various opinions once so fiercely agitated about religion, it recognises in all of them a common element of good, and it sees that all theologians and all sects have really agreed with one another, and been meaning the same thing, even when they least suspected or wished it. Nor is it, as modern study is showing us, varieties of Christianity only that this deeper unity underlies, but all other religions also. It has been well observed by a great Roman

Catholic writer now living, that whenever any great saintliness of life is to be observed amongst infidels and heretics, it is always found to be due to the presence of certain beliefs and rules which belong to the Catholics. And in like manner, we may say too, that whenever any great saintliness of life is to be observed amongst Catholics, it is due to the presence of certain beliefs and rules that belong to the infidels and the heretics—and indeed to all good men, no matter what their religion is.

‘Such are the views that all the most enlightened men of our own day are coming to. But the process is gradual; and meanwhile let us not rebuke our weaker brethren, if for the present “they follow not after us;” let us rather bear with them, and make all allowance for them; for we must remember, as I have said before, that those evils to which they still cling, but from which we, under God’s mercy, are trying to free ourselves, have done good service in their time; and that even such

doctrines as those of eternal punishment, or of sacerdotal absolution, or the subtleties of sacramental systems, or the mystical paradoxes of the Athanasian Creed, have assisted in the evolution of the good—have been, in some sense, “schoolmasters to bring men to God.” And even if we do occasionally come across some incident in the history of our religion—some doctrine or body of doctrines, which seems, humanly speaking, to subserve no good end at all—such as our own Thirty-nine Articles—let us not suffer such to try our faith, but let us trust in God, believing that in His secret councils He has found some fitting use even for these; because we know how many things there are, in every branch of inquiry, that we cannot explain, and yet we know that nothing happens but by those immutable and eternal laws which our Heavenly Father has Himself ordained, and of which He is Himself the highest synthesis.

‘And now,’ said the Doctor, with a fresh

briskness in his voice, '*I shall pass on to that wider point to which I have already alluded, which is indeed that which I wish chiefly to impress upon you, and to which all that I have hitherto said has been preparatory. We have come to see how genuine Christianity has been enabled to grow and extend itself only through an admixture of what we now recognise as evil. And seeing this, we shall be led on to a conclusion that is much wider. It has been said that it is the part of the devil to see in good the germs of evil. Is it not also the part of the devil not to recognise in evil the germs of good? May we not indeed say with St. Augustine, that absolute evil is impossible, because, if we look at it rightly, it is always rising up into good? And so, may we not recognise in all things the presence, and the providence of God?*

' Perhaps this view may at first sight seem difficult. Some of us may find that we have a certain amount of pride to swallow before we

can cheerfully acquiesce in it. It is not an uncommon thing to find persons who secretly flatter their vanity by cherishing a gloomy view of the world and of mankind. But if we can only get free from these littlenesses, and attain to that view which I have indicated, it will enlarge and ameliorate our own philosophy of things, and bring life and trust to us, in the place of doubt and despondency. Evil will then appear to us simply as undeveloped good—as something which we may acquiesce in without complaining—as something that has assisted in the development of whatever is good in the present, and which will itself one day become good in the future. Indeed it is not too much to say that all things, in a certain sense, existed first in the form of evil. It was not till after the Spirit of God had worked on the primeval matter that God pronounced the world to be "very good."

' And so, if we consider the subject thus, we shall learn to put a stop to all those fretful

wailings over the badness of our own times of which we hear so much—wailings over the unbelief of our neighbours, the corruption of society, the misery of the poor, the luxury of the rich, or the decline of commercial morality. The present is an age of change, and is therefore at every turn presenting to us some new feature. But if these come to us in the apparent guise of evils, let us not uselessly bemoan them; but let us believe that they are, even if we cannot see that it is so, but the beginnings, the embryos of new good. Indeed, by the eye of faith, even in the present day, may be discerned the beautiful spectacle of good actually shining through evil. May we not, for instance, discern the well-being of the rich through the misery of the poor? and again, the honest industry of the poor through the idleness of the rich?

‘ If then these things be so, surely we may look on unmoved at the great changes and commotions that are going on around us, and the

new forms that society, and thought, and politics are assuming, even although for the moment they may appear threatening. And if in this great storm our Master have fallen asleep, and no longer speak audibly to us, let us not be of little faith and fearful, and try to awaken Him with our foolish clamours ; but let us trust all to Him, and follow His example. For really, if we do but trust in God, there is no ground for fear, but "all things work together for good to him that believeth." And, however the matter may strike us at first sight, the times we live in are really the times that are best fitted for us ; and we shall see, if we will but think soberly, that we could not, as a whole, alter anything in them for the better. I do not mean that we have not each of us his own work marked out for him to do ; but all this work is strictly in relation to things as they are. God has given to us the general conditions under which we are to serve Him, and these are the best and indeed the only con-

ditions for us. Doubtless, if we each do the duty that lies before us, these conditions will be slowly and insensibly changed by us ; but we shall ourselves change also, as well as the conditions ; what I mean is, that supposing by a sudden act of will we could do what we pleased with the conditions of the age, we, being as we are, should not be really able to make the age better. We should not be really able to make it different. Any Utopia we might imagine would, if it were a thinkable one, be only our own age in a masquerading dress. For we cannot escape from our age, or add, except in a very small degree, anything that is really new to it. Nor need we wish to do so. Our age is for us the best age possible. We are its children, and it is our only true parent. But though we cannot alter our time at a stroke, so to speak, no, not even in imagination, we can all of us help to do so little by little, if we do cheerfully the duties that are set before us. And if we do this, which is what Christ bids

us to do, then is Christ made manifest in us, and lives in the hearts of every one of us ; and in a far higher sense than any mere physical one, He is risen from the dead. And if He be not so risen in and for us, then are we indeed, as the Apostle says, "of all men most miserable."

' Let us therefore, with a large hope for the future, and a cheerful contentment with the present, be willing to leave the world in the hands of God, knowing that He has given us what conditions and what circumstances are best for us. Let us see all things in God, and let us become in Him, as Plato says, "spectators of all time, and of all existence." And thus, in spite of the difficulties presented to us by "all the evil that is done under the sun," we shall perceive that all things will, nay must, come right in God's own time ; and the apparent dualism of good and evil at last become a glorious unity of good. But let us remember also that "the Kingdom of God

conclude not with observation ;" and I would conclude my sermon with certain memorable words spoken by Christ Himself, though unfortunately not to be found in the Gospels, but preserved to us by Clement of Alexandria. "The Lord," Clement tells us, "being asked when His kingdom should come, said, When two shall be one, and that which is without as that which is within, and the male with the female—neither male nor female."

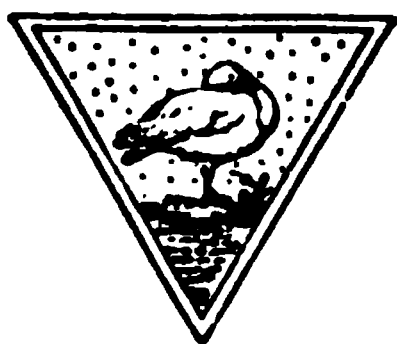
‘——And now——’ (at the sound of this word the whole congregation rose automatically to their feet), ‘I will ask you,’ the Doctor went on after a pause, ‘to conclude this morning’s service by doing what I trust I have shown that all here may sincerely and honestly do. I mean, I will ask you to recite after me the Apostles’ Creed.’

This appeal took the whole congregation quite aback. But there was no time for wonder. Dr. Jenkinson at once began ; nor was his voice the only sound in the theatre. Lady

Ambrose, pleased, after all that she had heard the night previous, to make public profession of her faith, especially in a place where it could not be called in question, followed the Doctor audibly and promptly ; Miss Prattle followed Lady Ambrose ; Lady Violet Gresham, who was busy with one of her sleeve-links, followed Miss Prattle ; Lady Grace, from quite another part of the house, followed Dr. Jenkinson on her own account ; Mr. Stockton repeated the first clause in a loud voice, and then relapsed into marked silence ; Mr. Luke only opened his lips to sigh out audibly in the middle a disconsolate ' Heigh ho ! ' Mr. Storks blew his nose with singular vigour through the whole proceeding ; Mrs. Sinclair, just towards the end, tapped Leslie's arm gently with her fan, and said to him in a whisper, ' Do you really believe all this ? '

When all was over, when the Doctor had solemnly pronounced the last ' Amen,' he looked about him nervously for a moment, as

if the question of how to retire becomingly suddenly dawned upon him. Luckily he perceived almost directly a servant standing in readiness by the curtain. The Doctor frowned slightly at the man; made a slightly impatient gesture at him; and Faust and the young witch again covered the preacher from the eyes of his congregation.





CHAPTER II.

THE blinds were half-down at luncheon in the dining-room, to keep out the brilliant summer sun.

The guests dropped in by ones and twos, somewhat tired and exhausted by the divine service of the morning ; and the sight of the table was not a little refreshing to them, as it shone whitely in the soft gloom, with its flowers and ferns, and its day-lit glimmer of glass and silver. Soon, however, a piece of news was circulated that was even more refreshing than the luncheon. Dr. Jenkinson, owing to his late exertions, and the gas-light, and the draughts upon the stage, was suffer-

ing from a headache, which inclined him to keep his room ; and accordingly an un hoped-for prospect of freely discussing the sermon dawned brightly upon the whole party.

Mr. Stockton, who had been much struck with the strictly prosaic style of Dr. Jenkinson's discourse, and who had been secretly contrasting this with the more impassioned character of his own mind, was the first to begin.

'The sermon was perhaps ingenious,' he said, turning to Lady Ambrose, 'but I'm afraid our friend's forte is certainly not poetry.'

'Surely,' said Donald Gordon with extreme solemnity of manner and only a slight twinkle in his eye, 'his forte is something far better. Poetry can only make us happy for a little while. Such doctrines as we have heard this morning ought to make us happy always.'

As for Lady Ambrose, to whom both these remarks were addressed, she was in

doubt what altogether to think of the matter. More than half her heart inclined her to look upon Dr. Jenkinson as a valuable ally; but there was yet, all the while, a fatal something that whispered to her a vague distrust of him. She was therefore waiting anxiously to hear what would be said by others, before taking any side herself; her mind all the while being busy with the profoundest questions. This suspense of judgment produced a certain gravity and depression in her, which was visible on her face, and which seemed to communicate itself to nearly everyone at her end of the table. For Lady Ambrose was a communicative woman. Her spirits, good or bad, were generally caught by those near her. As for Mr. Herbert, however, no one else seemed needed to depress *him*. Low, slow, and melancholy, his accents at once caught the ear of Lady Ambrose.

‘I have heard to-day,’ he said to Mrs. Sinclair, who was sitting next him, ‘an

entirely new and in every way memorable doctrine, which I never heard before from the mouth of man, woman, or child ; nor can I tell by what steps any human being could have arrived at it. I have heard that the world—the world as it is—could not be better than it is ; that there is no real sorrow in it—no real evil—no real sin.'

'Poor Dr. Jenkinson !' said Mrs. Sinclair, also in a melancholy voice ; 'I suppose he has never loved.'

'Ah,' exclaimed Mr. Stockton,—his voice was melancholy as well—'the whole teachings of that school have always seemed to me nothing more than a few fragments of science imperfectly understood, obscured by a few fragments of Christianity imperfectly remembered.'

'You forget,' said Leslie, 'that Dr. Jenkinson's Christianity is really a new firm trading under an old name, and trying to purchase the goodwill of the former establishment.'

Lady Ambrose, who had not liked Leslie so much on farther acquaintance as she had at first expected she should, was very indignant at him for so flippant a speech as this—she felt sure it was flippant, though she did not quite understand its meaning—but once again Mr. Herbert's grave accents arrested her.

‘It is simply,’ he was saying to Mrs. Sinclair, evidently alluding to the same subject—‘it is simply our modern atheism, trying to hide its own nakedness, for the benefit of the more prudish part of the public, in the cast grave-clothes of a Christ who, whether he be risen or no, is very certainly, as the angel said, not here.’

‘All discussion of such matters seems to me but a diseased activity,’ said Mr. Rose, raising languidly a white deprecating hand.

Mr. Storks too, though for different reasons, was apparently of the same opinion.

‘In his main points,’ he said with a severe

dogmatism that seemed designed to end all further controversy, 'and putting aside his quasi-religious manner of expressing it—which considering his position may be pardoned—I conceive Dr. Jenkinson to have been entirely right.'

Hitherto Lady Ambrose's views had been wavering to and fro, in a sad uncertainty. But now her mind at once cleared. Her worst suspicions of the Doctor were confirmed by this fatal commendation. The gloom on her face deepened, and she had a look almost of distress about her as she turned to Laurence.

'You look tired,' he said to her.

'No,' said Lady Ambrose, wearily: 'at least, perhaps I am a little. Do you know, I always think one feels rather dull if one doesn't get the letters one expects.'

'Perhaps you don't know,' said Laurence, 'that the letters you got this morning were only those of last night's post. Our Sunday

letters we are obliged to send for, and they don't generally come till later on in the day.'

'Really!' exclaimed Lady Ambrose, with surprise, as a smile slowly spread over her face, and her frank eyes lit up again. 'The Duchess couldn't have forgotten it,' she said to herself half-consciously. Strangely enough, a new warmth, it seemed, had dawned upon her, and her ice-bound gloom began to thaw—to thaw only, however, not to evaporate. It did not go; it only became voluble.

'Do you know, Mr. Laurence,' she began, 'I have been thinking over and over again about many of the things that were said last night; and I really am afraid that the world is getting very bad. It is very sad to think so; but, with all this infidelity and wickedness of which we hear so much, I'm afraid it is true. For my own part, you know, there is nothing I dislike so much as to hear the Bible profanely spoken about; though, of

course, I know one is tempted sometimes to make jokes out of it oneself. And then,' Lady Ambrose added—her ideas did not always follow one another in the strictest order—'hardly a week passes without some new scandal. I had a letter only this morning, telling me all the particulars about Colonel Eardly and poor Lady Arthur. And that man, you know—just fancy it!—it will not be very long before we shall be obliged to receive him again. However,' said Lady Ambrose, with a slightly more cheerful accent, 'that sort of thing, I believe, is confined to us. The middle classes are all right—at least, one always hears so.'

At this moment Lord Allen's voice was heard.

'But now,' Lady Ambrose went on to Laurence, very slightly moving her head in the direction of Lord Allen, and speaking in a low tone, 'how different *he* is!'

Lady Ambrose had the greatest admira-

tion for Lord Allen, though her acquaintance with him had hitherto been of the slightest ; and Laurence, not knowing how to respond to all her late remarks, was glad that her attention was thus called elsewhere.

‘Don’t you think,’ Allen was saying, half addressing himself to Mr. Herbert, half to Mr. Luke, ‘that though at the present moment things as they are may be worse than they have ever been before, there are yet ideas amongst us of things as they might be, that are in advance of what has ever been before? I know quite well how society is falling to pieces, and how all our notions of duty are becoming confused or lost. I know too how utterly without any religion we are,’—(Lady Ambrose started)—‘at least any religion that one man can express to another, and that can enable men to act in concert. But still, I can’t help feeling that, in spite of all this, a higher class of conceptions both of religion and morality, and

social relations also, is forming itself in the minds of thinking men.'

'Perfectly true, Lord Allen,' said Mr. Luke, 'perfectly true! It is indeed the very essence of the cultured classes to be beyond their time—to have, indeed, every requisite for making everything better, except the practical power. As you say, what man's life ought to be—what true morality is—what is true sense, and what is true nonsense—these are matters never at any time distinguished so truly as by some of us in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Only, unfortunately,' said Mr. Luke, sighing slowly, and looking round the table, 'the dense ignorance of the world at large hampers and hinders such men as these, so that all that their teaching and their insight can do, is only to suggest a Utopia in the future, instead of leading to any reality in the present.'

'All *my* happiness is in a kind of Utopia,' sighed Mrs. Sinclair.

‘Yes—yes,’ said Mr. Luke, wearily; ‘so in these days must be the happiness of all of us—except that of the world at large.’

Mr. Storks was here heard clearing his throat. With an ominous pugilistic smile he turned towards Mr. Luke.

‘Are you quite sure,’ he said, ‘that the reason why your friends do nothing practical is not because they will build Utopias? I, as I have already said, entirely hold with Dr. Jenkinson that the world is as good as it can be—has, indeed, been always as good as it could have been—has, that is, been always persistently progressing by one constant course of evolution. I don’t myself profess to be a student of history; but, as far as I at all understand its teachings, the one thing it most clearly shows to us is, that what strikes a superficial observer as simply the decadence of old orders of things, is really, under the surface, the birth of the new. Indeed,’ said Mr. Storks, shrugging his shoulders, ‘of course

it must be so. We are all part of Nature ; and, little as we think it, we are all working together by invincible and inviolable laws. Nature will have her own way ; and those who have studied her carefully know that her way is always the best. Even supposing we could transplant ourselves into some different, some more advanced state of society, my dear Sir, do you think we should be any happier there ? As much happier, I suppose, as you or I should be if we were translated into the heaven our nurses used to tell us of, where nothing was done but to sing Tate and Brady's psalms with the angels to all eternity. The air of our own age is the only air fit for us. In any other we should languish.'

' I languish in this,' said Mr. Luke, looking up to the ceiling.

Scarcely were the words out of his mouth than Mr. Saunders exclaimed, in his most excited and shrillest voice, ' I deny it—I entirely deny it !'

Mr. Luke was thunderstruck. Even Mr. Storks was taken aback by the audacity of the contradiction; and as for the rest of the company, they could not conceive where on earth Mr. Saunders had left his manners. Mr. Storks, however, was still more astonished, and still less pleased, when he discovered, as Mr. Saunders proceeded, what was the real meaning of his speech.

‘I entirely deny,’ Mr. Saunders went on, ‘that the ways of Nature are the best ways. The belief that they are so is of all faiths the one that most obviously contradicts experience. Did I accept this, I could accept anything—Transubstantiation even. I should literally feel that I had no right to condemn any doctrine because it was groundless, gratuitous, and absurd. This faith in the goodness of Nature—why, that it *is* a faith, is not that enough to condemn it? What but faith, let me ask, has enslaved and stunted the world hitherto? And this particular faith, I would

remind you, which you flatter yourself will oppose religion, has been in most cases its child, and is always ready to be its parent. I on the contrary maintain that, far from being the best, Nature is the most odious of things—that the whole universe is constructed on the most hateful principles; in fact that out of the primordial atoms only one thing has developed itself in which the good outweighs the evil; and that is the one thing that is usually opposed to Nature—man, and the reason of man.'

Mr. Storks turned sharply round, and with an awful look in his eyes of contemptuous indignation, stared Mr. Saunders into silence. He held him fixed in this way for a few moments, and then said to him in a voice of grim unconcern, 'May I trouble you for the mustard.' Then again turning to Mr. Luke, 'You see,' he proceeded, 'what I take to be civilisation—indeed the whole duty of man,

is the gradual self-adaptation of the human organism to its environment—an adaptation which must take place, and any attempts to hinder which are simply neither more nor less than disease. Progress, which it is our highest life to further, is a thing that will continue despite the opposition of individuals. Its tendencies are beyond the control of individuals, and are to be sought in the spirit of the age at large,—not—if you will forgive me the word—in the crotchets of this or that thinker. And it seems to me to be the hopeful and distinguishing feature of the present day, that men are learning generally to recognise this truth—that they are learning not to cry out against progress, but to investigate its grand and inevitable laws, and submit themselves willingly to them. And the tendency of our own day is, I am proud to say, a tendency towards firm, solid, verifiable knowledge, and, as a result of this, towards the acquisition of a firm and solid happiness also.'

‘To me,’ said Mr. Herbert, ‘it seems rather that the only hope for the present age lies in the possibility of some individual wiser than the rest getting the necessary power, and in the most arbitrary way possible putting a stop to this progress—utterly stamping out and obliterating every general tendency peculiar to our own time. Mr. Storks will perhaps think me very foolish. Perhaps I am. I freely own that I could more easily tell a good action if I saw it, than a good piece of protoplasm, and that I think the understanding of a holy moral law, by which an individual may live, of infinitely more importance than the discovery of all the laws of progress in the world. But let Mr. Storks despise me, and not be angry with me——’

‘My dear sir,’ interposed Mr. Storks, with a gruff courtesy, ‘why should I do either the one or the other?’

‘Because,’ said Mr. Herbert, slightly

waving his hand, and speaking with great emphasis, 'had I only the power, I would myself put a forcible stop to all this evolution. I would make a clean sweep of all the improvements that the present day so much vaunts. I would collect an army of strong, serviceable, honest workmen, and send them to blow up Manchester, and Birmingham, and Liverpool, and Leeds, and Wolverhampton——'

'And all the artisans in them?' asked Mr. Storks.

'Well,' said Mr. Herbert, smiling, 'I would, perhaps, give the artisans notice of this gunpowder plot of mine. And yet their existence has always presented a painful difficulty to me. For if there is no other life, I think they have a very bad time of it here; and if there is another life, I think that they will all certainly be damned. But it is not only Manchester and Birmingham that I would blow up. I would blow up also every

anatomical museum in the land, save such as were absolutely necessary for the use of professional doctors, that the foul sights in them should not taint men's imaginations, and give them an appetite for beastly knowledge. I would destroy every railway, and nearly every steam-engine ; and I would do a number of other things of a like sort, by way of preparing the ground for a better state of society. Indeed, so far am I from believing that an entirely different and better state of society is unthinkable, that I believe it to be not impracticable ; and I am at the present moment collecting money, from such as will here and there confide in me, for the purpose of purchasing land, and of founding a community upon what seem to me to be true and healthful principles—a Utopia, in fact—in which I trust may be once again realised upon earth those two things to which we are now such strangers—order and justice.'

' I once began a book about justice,' said

Laurence, 'on the model of Plato's Republic.'

'What is Plato's Republic?' said Lady Ambrose. 'Tell me.'

'It is a book,' said Laurence, 'which describes the meeting of a party of friends, who fell discussing high topics just as we are doing, and, amongst others, What is justice?'

'What!' exclaimed Lady Ambrose. 'Did not they know that?'

'You forget,' said Laurence, 'that this was very long ago.'

'To be sure,' said Lady Ambrose; 'and they were of course all heathens. Well—and what conclusions did they come to as to the nature of justice?'

'At first,' said Laurence, 'though Socrates himself was amongst them, they were all completely at a loss how to define it. But at last they hit upon the notion of constructing an ideal perfect state, in which of course justice

would be lurking somewhere. Now there are in life, Plato says, four great virtues—wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice; and no sooner has the ideal state been constructed, than it appears that three of these virtues are specially illustrated and embodied, each in a particular class of citizens. Thus, wisdom is specially embodied in the theoretical politicians and religious speculators of the day; courage is embodied in the practical men who maintain and execute the regulations and orders of the philosophers; and temperance is embodied in the commercial and industrial classes, who loyally submit themselves to their betters, and refrain from meddling in matters that are too high for them. And now, where is justice? In what class is that embodied specially?’

‘In the judges and the magistrates and the policemen,’ said Lady Ambrose.

‘No,’ said Laurence; ‘it is peculiar to no class. It resides in all. It is that virtue

which enables the others to exist and to continue.'

'But surely,' said Lady Ambrose, 'all that is not what we mean by justice now?'

'Certainly not,' said Laurence; 'and my book was designed to investigate what justice is, as it exists now. I, like Plato, constructed a state, making it, however, a real rather than an ideal picture. But when I had done this, I could find no earnest thinking class to represent wisdom; no class of practical politicians that would carry out even the little wisdom they knew, and so represent courage; and certainly no commercial or industrial class that would refrain for a single day from meddling in matters that were too high for them, and so represent temperance. So I analysed life in a somewhat different way. I divided it into happiness, misery, and justice. I then at once discovered that the rich represented all the happiness of which we are now capable, and the poor all the misery; and that

justice was that which set this state of things going and enabled it to continue.'

'Ah, Laurence,' exclaimed Mr. Herbert, clapping his hands gently in sad applause, 'I like that. I wish you had worked out this idea more fully.'

'Suppose,' exclaimed Leslie, 'that we try this afternoon to construct a Utopia ourselves. Let us embody our notions of life as it ought to be in a new Republic.'

'Well,' said Lady Ambrose, 'I am not a Conservative; I don't object. I'm sure at any rate that there is much we could all of us alter, if we only had our own way.'

'Much,' said Lady Grace, with severe briskness.

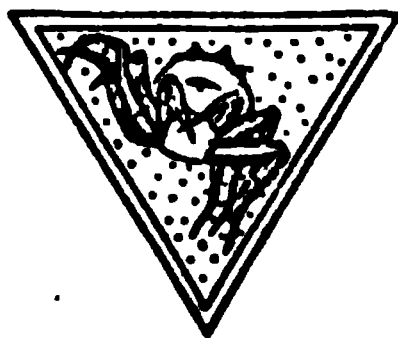
'Much,' said Miss Merton, with a soft, half serious smile.

'Much,' said Lord Allen, catching eagerly at the idea.

'Well, then,' said Laurence, 'let us all do

our best to give those airy somethings, our aspirations, a local habitation and a name.'

The majority of the company took very kindly to the proposal. Lady Grace was especially pleased, as it seemed to provide at once a whole afternoon's occupation for the party ; and it was arranged accordingly that as soon as luncheon was over they should adjourn for castle-building to a shady spot in the garden.





CHAPTER III.

GUIDED by Lady Grace, the guests gradually converged after luncheon towards the appointed spot, straggling thither by various ways, and in desultory groups; passing down broad flights of steps flanked by gods and goddesses, and along straight terraces set with vases and Irish yews; while busts of orators, poets and philosophers, with Latin inscriptions, glimmered to right and left of them in groves of laurels; and scaly Tritons, dappled with green lichens, spouted up water in the middle of gleaming basins. Everything was to-

day looking at its loveliest. There was an unusual freshness in the warm summer air. Beyond the green shrubs the sea shone bright and blue; and through the shrubs the sea-breeze moved and whispered.

Laurence strolled slowly on behind with Miss Merton, choosing a path which none of the others had taken.

‘How delicious this is!’ said Miss Merton, lifting her hat to enjoy the breeze upon her forehead. ‘Nobody could be in bad spirits in a place like this. There is something so fresh and living everywhere, and even when we lose sight of the sea we still hear it.’

‘Yes,’ said Laurence. ‘I believe these gardens are like Keats’s island. There is no recess in them

Not haunted by the murmurous sound of waves.’

‘And how perfectly everything is kept! What gardeners you must have!’ said Miss Merton, as they turned up a narrow winding

walk, thickly set on either side with carefully-trimmed laurels.

The whole place was, indeed, as Miss Merton said, kept perfectly. Not a weed was on the grey gravel; not a single twig called for pruning. Every vase they passed was full of the most delicious flowers. Overhead the branches of limes and of acacia-trees murmured gaily. Everything seemed to be free from care, and to be laughing, light of heart, in the bright weather.

‘I am taking you this way,’ said Laurence, ‘because I want to show you what I think may perhaps interest you.’

As he spoke these words, a sudden bend in the walk brought them face to face with something that gave Miss Merton a sudden sensation of surprise. It was a small classical portico built in a style of the most severe simplicity, through which by an iron gate one passed into an open space beyond. What surprised Miss Merton on seeing this was the

singular sense of desolation and dreariness that seemed all at once to come over her. The iron gates before her were a mass of rust ; the portico, which had once been white, was weather-stained into a dismal grey ; the stone, too, it was built of was scaling off in almost every place, and the fragments lay unheeded as they had fallen upon the ground. Here, amongst everything that spoke of the utmost care, was one object that spoke of entire forgetfulness and neglect. They approached in silence, and Miss Merton looked in through the bars of the rusty gate. The scene that met her eyes was one of greater desolation still. It was a circular plot of ground, fenced round by a low stone wall that was surmounted by spiked railings. It looked as though it might have been once a flower garden, but it was now a wilderness. Outside its boundary rose the rare and beautiful trees of the happy tended shrubberies. Inside were nettles, brambles, and long weedy grass.

Nothing else was visible in this melancholy enclosure but three cypresses, apparently of various ages, the two smaller planted near together, the third, and by far the largest, standing apart by itself.

Miss Merton was quite at a loss what to make of the strange spot; and, as Laurence was feeling in his pocket for the key, she asked him if it had anything to do with breeding pheasants.

‘Do you see what is written above the gate?’ said Laurence, as he pointed to a dim inscription whose letters still retained a glimmer of fading gold; ‘can you read it?’

Neque harum, quas colis, arborum
Te, præter invisam cupressum,
Ulla brevem dominum sequetur.

“Of all these trees which you love so, the hated cypress only shall follow its master, and be faithful to him in his narrow house.” But come—let us go inside, if you are not afraid of the long grass.’

They passed through the gate, which gave a low wail upon its hinges, and Miss Merton followed Laurence, knee-deep in grass and nettles, to the smallest of the three cypress-trees. There Laurence paused. At the foot of the tree Miss Merton saw a flat slab of marble, with something written upon it; and for the first time she felt certain that she must be in a place of graves.

‘This,’ said Laurence, pointing to the little cypress, ‘was planted only five years ago, ten days before the poor old man died who now sleeps under it. This is my uncle’s grave. Do you see the inscription?’

Omnis moriar, nullaue pars mei
Vitabit Libitinam.

“I shall wholly die, and there is no part of me that will escape the Venus of death.” That, and that alone, he chose to have written over him.’

Laurence spoke with some feeling, but

Miss Merton was so much surprised that she hardly knew what response to make.

‘And does nobody take any care of this place?’ at last she said.

‘No,’ said Laurence. ‘By his own last orders, nobody. But come—you must look at this too.’ And he motioned her towards the neighbouring cypress.

At the foot of this, almost hidden by the long grass, Miss Merton saw something that surprised her still more strangely. It was the statue of a woman half reclining in a languid attitude on a block of hewn marble. The figure was full and beautiful, and the features of the face were singularly fine; but there was something in the general effect that struck one at the first moment as not pleasing. What slight drapery there was, was disposed meretriciously over the rounded limbs; on the arms were heavy bracelets; one of the hands held a half-inverted wine-cup, and the other was laid negligently on a heap of coins.

But what jarred most upon the feelings was the face, with its perfect features. For a cold sneer was fixed upon the full mouth and the fine nostrils ; and the eyes, with a leer of petulant sensuality, seemed to be fixed for ever upon the flat neighbouring gravestone.

‘ This cypress,’ said Laurence, ‘ is much older than the other. It was planted twenty years ago ; and twenty years ago the original of that statue was laid beneath it. She was one of those many nameless ladies—for, as you know, he completely exiled himself from society all the latter part of his life—who from time to time shared his fortunes at the house here. She was too by far the loveliest. She was at the same time the hardest, the most selfish, the most mercenary as well. And he knew it too. In spite of the distraction he found in her companionship, he was never for a moment deceived about her. At last, having made a fortune out of him, she was thinking of leaving him. But one day, suddenly she

caught a chill and died. She died here, and here she was buried. That statue, as you may imagine, is his design not hers. The attitude, the drapery, the wine-cup held in one hand, and the money in the other, are according to his express direction; and by his direction, too, that face, with its lovely features, leers and sneers at him for ever, as he rests in his neglected grave. See, too, there is the epitaph which he chose for her:—

*Lusisti satis, edisti satis, atque bibisti ;
Tempus abire tibi est.*

“ You have wantoned enough with me—you have eaten enough of my substance—you have drunk enough of my champagne; 'tis high time for you to go.” And now,’ said Laurence, ‘let us come to the third tree, and you shall see what is overshadowed by it.’

They passed across the enclosure to the largest of the three cypresses, and at the foot of that Miss Merton discovered a third grave-

stone, also with a poetical inscription. 'That,' said Laurence, 'you can read without help of mine.'

Miss Merton looked; and the lines were not new to her:—

A slumber did my spirit seal,
I knew no mortal fears.
She seemed a thing that could not feel
The touch of earthly years.

She knows no motion now, nor force,
She neither feels nor sees,
Rolled round in earth's diurnal course
With rocks, and stones, and trees.

'Here,' said Laurence, 'is the oldest grave of all. Its date is that of the tree that stands beside it, and that was planted forty years ago. Under that stone lies the only woman—except myself, almost the only thing—that the old man ever really loved. This was in his young days. He was only thirty when she died; and her death was the great turning-point of his life. She lived with him for two years, in a little cottage that stood on the very spot where he afterwards built the villa. She

has no name, you see, on the grave-stone, and I had best not give her any. She was some one's wife, but not his. That is her story. I have her miniature somewhere, which one day I should like to show you. It is a lovely dark face, with liquid, spiritual eyes, and under it are written two lines of Byron's, which might have been composed for her :—

She walks in beauty like the night
Of cloudless climes and starry skies.

Well, there she lies now ; and the old man's youth lies buried with her. It was her death that made him a philosopher. He built this great place here, and laid out these gardens half to kill his grief for her, and half to keep alive her memory ; and here, as you see, he buried her. She gave up all that was best in her for the love of him. He gave up all that was best in him for the loss of her.'

'And is this place left quite uncared for ?' said Miss Merton, looking around her.

'It is left,' said Laurence, 'as he wished

it should be. It was one of his most special orders that, when he was dead and buried, no further care of any kind should be spent on it. The grass and weeds were to be left to grow wild in it, the rails to rust, the portico to decay and crumble. "Do you think," he said to me, "that I know so little of life as to flatter myself that any single creature will regret me when I am gone, or even waste a thought upon me? I do not chose, as Christians do, to rest for ever under a lie; for their tombs are lying monuments that they are remembered; mine shall be a true one that I am forgotten. Yes," he said, "it makes me laugh to think of myself—me, who have built this house and planted these gardens which others will enjoy—rotting in the midst of it all, under thorns and brambles, in a little dismal wilderness. And then perhaps, Otho," he would say to me, "some of your friends who will walk about these gardens in a year or two—Christians, no doubt, with

the devil knows what of fine sentiments about faith and immortality—will look in through the bars of the gate, and be shocked at that honest wilderness, that unconcealed neglect, which is the only real portion of those that have been.” But during his last illness he softened just a little, and admitted that I, he did believe, cared for him and might, when he was dead, every now and then think of him. “And so,” he said, “if you like to do it, come every now and then, and scrape the moss from my inscription, and from the two others. But that is all I will have you do—that, and nothing more. That will express all that it is possible that you should feel for me.” I promised him to do no more than that, and that I do. Poor old man!’ Laurence went on meditatively, as they passed out of the gates, and were again in the bright trim garden; ‘He thought that he belonged to times before his own; but I think that in reality he belonged to times after them. If he was

Roman at all, as he always fancied himself, he was Roman only in that sombre ennui that through all his later years oppressed him ; and which seems to me to be now settling down upon the world—an ennui that always kept him seeking for pleasures, and that turned the pleasures into ashes as soon as he possessed them. His pleasures were high and low ; but the higher made him despise the lower ; and the lower he sought simply that he might drown the higher. Two things only during his last years never palled upon him : one was, saying a sharp thing neatly ; the other, detecting some new weakness in human nature. In this he seemed really to revel. On the littlenesses and the pretences of men, especially when they turned out failures, he seemed to look with a passionate contemptuous fondness, like a wicked prince on a peasant-girl. See—here was his summer study—this stone pavilion. Let us go in for a moment, and I will show it to you.'

They were in front of a small quasi-classical building of white marble, embowered behind in arbutus and in myrtles, and commanding from its large windows a full view of the sea. Laurence unlocked the door, and he and Miss Merton entered.

Inside there was a faint musty smell, and a general sense that the place had been long disused. The walls were completely lined with books in splendid bindings, whose gilded backs glimmered temptingly through the network of the bookcase doors. In the centre stood a table, covered with a cloth of faded crimson velvet; nothing on it but a tarnished ormolu inkstand, in the shape of a Roman temple, across the columns of which spiders had woven dusty webs. Placed stiffly before the table stood a gilded arm-chair, with cushions of crimson damask, and under it a foot-stool to match, which had been worn quite bare by the old philosopher's feet.

'Here,' said Laurence, 'he would sit day

after day amongst his books, drawing, or reading, or writing, or looking out at his flowers or at the sea. Look, these two folios, bound in red morocco, are a collection of his verses, letters, essays and so on, that he had had privately printed. They are not all, I'm afraid, quite fit to read. But this first volume is all right. I should like to take it out and show it to you by-and-bye. But come—I have nothing more to exhibit now. We had better join the others. They will not be far off,' he said, as they left the pavilion; 'indeed, I think I can hear them talking.'

In another moment they had passed through an arch of evergreens, and found themselves on the spot where nearly all the rest of the party had already assembled, disposed in an easy group upon the grass. The place was an amphitheatre of velvet turf, set round with laurels and all kinds of shrubs; in the arena of which—if one may so speak—a little fountain splashed cool and restless in

a porphyry basin. Overhead the blue summer sky was screened by the whispering shade of tall trees ; and above the dark laurel leaves the fresh sea was seen in the distance, an azure haze full of sparklings. The whole scene, as Miss Merton and Laurence, with his gorgeous folio under his arm, came upon it, was curiously picturesque. The various dresses made against the green turf a soft medley of colours. The ladies were in white and black and pale yellow, green and crimson and dove-colour. All the men, except Mr. Luke, were in shooting coats ; and Mr. Saunders, who wore knickerbockers, had even pink stockings. And here, as the lights and shades flickered over them, and the gentle air breathed upon them, they seemed altogether like a party from which an imaginative on-looker might have expected a new Decameron.

Already, under Lady Grace's vigorous guidance, a certain amount of talk had begun *à propos* of the new Republic ; all the ladies,

with the exception of Mrs. Sinclair, having fallen to discussing the true position of women, or rather of woman, and their opinions on this point being a little various. But besides this, the post had arrived; and that too had created some excitement. Lady Ambrose in particular had become delightfully radiant, on receiving a large envelope that was stiff as she handled it; and which she saw contained, as she just peeped into it, a card, on the top of which was printed, '*To have the honour to meet—*' She had too just extracted from Lord Allen a promise to come and stay with her, next autumn, in the country; and her measure of good spirits was quite full.

'Now, Mr. Laurence,' she exclaimed, dangling her hat in her hand, 'do come and put a stop to this. You see what a woman's parliament would be if we ever have one, which my husband says is not at all impossible. Here is one of us who thinks that everything will go well if women can only

learn to paint flowers on white dessert plates, and get fifteen shillings apiece for them.'

'And I,' said Lady Grace, smiling good-naturedly, 'was just saying that they all ought to be taught logic.'

'Perfectly true,' exclaimed Mr. Saunders, putting up his spectacles to see who had spoken.

'And Miss Merton,' said Lady Ambrose, 'thinks that we should all be taught to walk the hospitals, or be sick-nurses.'

'I should not so much mind that,' said Mrs. Sinclair, 'in war time, if one had anyone fighting in whose life one really took an interest. I once thought, Mr. Leslie, that that might really be my mission, perhaps.'

'But,' said Lady Ambrose, 'how are we to build a castle in the air together, if we are all at cross purposes like this?'

There did indeed seem little prospect of their getting to work at all; until Leslie exclaimed at last that he thought he had found a way.

‘See,’ said Mrs. Sinclair, ‘I told you a little while ago you would be wanted to talk cleverly. And now, Mr. Leslie, don’t you think you would be more comfortable if you sat a little farther off? or Lady Grace, of whom I am already afraid, will begin to think we’re flirting.’

‘Well,’ said Leslie, ‘in spite of all our differences, I think I see a way in which we shall all be able to set to work together. We want to imagine a state that shall be as nearly perfect as we can make it. Well and good. Now we shall all admit, I suppose, that in a perfect state all the parts will be perfect, and each part will imply and involve all the others. Given one bone, we shall be able to construct the entire animal. Let us then take one part, and imagine that first. Let us take the highest class in our state, and see what we think that ought to be, looking on it in the first place not as a corporate body of superiors, but as an assembly of equals. Let

us, I mean, to put it in other words, begin with seeing what we really wish society to be — what we really think that the highest and most refined life consists in, that is possible for the most favoured classes ; and then let us see afterwards what is implied in this.'

Leslie's proposal was welcomed eagerly by everyone.

'Well,' said Lady Ambrose, 'and so we are each of us to say, are we, what we think is the essence of good society ? Come then, who knows ?'

'Art,' murmured Mr. Rose.

'Reason,' said Mr. Saunders.

'Unworldliness, based on knowledge of the world,' said Miss Merton.

'Wait a moment,' said Laurence, 'we are going too fast. This is not what Mr. Leslie means.'

'No, no,' said Mr. Saunders. 'Let us get rid of what is evil before we introduce what is good. I should begin by getting rid

of every belief that is not based upon reason, and every sentiment whose existence cannot be accounted for.'

'Here we are,' said Lady Ambrose, 'all over the place. Now if I might be allowed to say what I thought was the essence of good society, I should say that a great part of it, at least, was the absence of dull and vulgar people.'

'Excellent!' exclaimed Mr. Luke, 'and a capital exclusion with which to begin our new Republic.'



BOOK III.



CHAPTER I.

YES,' said Mr. Luke still more solemnly, 'if we only follow this out—this idea of the exclusion from our society of all vulgar and extraneous elements, we shall find we have done a great deal more than we may at first think. We shall have at once a free, and liberal, and untainted social and intellectual atmosphere, in which our thoughts, and feelings, and refinements, and ways of living, may develop themselves to the utmost, unimpeded. Lady Ambrose has certainly begun with hitting the right nail on the head.'

Could Lady Ambrose have been told,

when she left London the afternoon before, that in another twenty-four hours she would be taking the lead in the construction of a Utopia, or ideal state of society, suggested by the writings of a Greek philosopher, she would have been utterly at a loss to know what the prophecy meant; and had she known what it meant, she would certainly not have believed it. Indeed, as it was, she could hardly imagine that Mr. Luke was serious, and that he was not laughing at her; so she said quickly and in a tone of self-defence,

‘Of course I know that there must be something more than the mere exclusion of vulgar people, Mr. Luke. We must have religion, and all that, and——’

‘Ah,’ exclaimed Mr. Luke, interrupting her with a grand wave of the hand, ‘My dear Lady Ambrose, let us leave all that till by-and-bye. Let us be content to begin with simpler matters first.’

‘Let us begin with the flowers of life,’

said Leslie, 'and when we have chosen these, let us trace them back to their roots.'

'I quite think,' said Miss Merton, 'that in a really good society—one that was perfectly good even in the superficial sense of the word—we should find, if we only had eyes enough, religion lurking somewhere, and everything else we want.'

'And so that's *your* view, my dear, is it?' said Lady Ambrose. 'Oh, then, I suppose since you a Roman Catholic think so, I may also.'

'Surely, too,' said Miss Merton, 'we must all know that nothing can be so bad, either for the pushers or the pushed, as the struggle of people to get into what they think is good society, not in the least because they care to be there, but merely because they care to be known to be there.'

Lady Ambrose, who perhaps felt unconsciously some small pricks of conscience here, again looked doubtful, and said, 'Still, if we

really want to make a perfect state, this does not seem a very serious thing to begin with.'

'Listen,' exclaimed Laurence, 'let me read you something I have here—something of my uncle's, which I have just thought of. It is a short adaptation of Aristotle's *Ethics*.'

Lady Ambrose started. Hearing two words, the one as long as *Aristotle*, and the other as unfamiliar as *Ethics*, she began to think that she had made the conversation serious with a vengeance. Indeed, the whole party, as well as herself, showed some signs of surprise.

'It is very short,' said Laurence, 'and I will only read a page or two. It is called "A system of Ethics, adapted from Aristotle, for the use of the English Nation." It was suggested to him—' (and this bewildered Lady Ambrose still more, though at the same time it gave her some gleam of hope), 'by a very rich vulgar family, who bought a place near here, and

who much annoyed and amazed him by the great court they paid to him. This is the first chapter; it treats of "*The Summum Bonum, or The moral End of action.*" Listen—

Ethics being the art and science of human action, as directed towards the chief good of life—that highest and final end, to which, if we think a little, we shall see all other ends are subordinate; it is evident that our first task must be, as our master Aristotle well says, to form a clear conception of what this end, the chief good, is.

Now on this point Aristotle would seem to err. For he, following the common opinion of men, affirms the chief good to be happiness, holding the only question to be, in what does true happiness lie? And if he had been philosophising for savages, he would indeed have been in the right. But because savages and men in a state of nature have all one end of action, which is happiness, it by no

means follows that the same is true of civilised nations, and that these may not have ends that are far higher. It is indeed evident that they have. And not this only, but that of such ends there is a very great variety. To describe and number these with anything like absolute accuracy is neither required nor admitted by the nature of the subject. But we shall be sufficiently near the truth if we say that there is a separate and characteristic chief good for each civilised nation—(quot gentes tot summa bona)—and that it is by this in each case that the national character is determined. A glance at the continent of Europe will at once illustrate this, and suggest examples to us of these national chief goods. We shall see the Germans, for instance, following what is called Thought to its inmost recesses, the French what is called Life. We shall find accordingly that the chief good of the former nation, which is perhaps the highest of all, is the knowledge of the unknowable; whilst that of

the latter, which is next to it in dignity, is the practice of the unmentionable. And so on with all the other nations; each will be found to have its separate chief good; and none of these to have the least connection with happiness. For us, however, who are English, and writing for English readers, it will be enough to concern ourselves simply with the chief good of the English.

'We shall discover this, in the same way as we did that of the French and Germans, in an examination of our own special national characteristic. First, however, we must be clear what this characteristic is; and here it will be well to take our neighbours' opinions of us as well as our own. If we inquire then in what light we present ourselves to the other European nations, we shall find that just as the Germans are known mainly as a profound nation, and the French as a prurient nation, so are we, in like manner, now known as a vulgar nation. And as this view of us exactly tallies

with our own, it appears evident that the special national characteristic of the English is vulgarity, and that the chief good of the English is the final end that is aimed at by the English vulgar classes.

' This we affirm to be social distinction, to their admiration and pursuit of which is due that cardinal moral quality which they call worldliness in themselves, and snobbishness in their friends and enemies. And if any object that to a great part of the nation social distinction in its true sense is a thing unknown, and that to another part it is a thing that comes without being struggled for, and so in neither case can be the end of moral action, we shall answer them that to object this, is much the same as to argue that a peach tree does not bear peaches because none are to be seen growing out of the roots ; or that there is no meaning in the Athanasian Creed because none is attached to it by the only people who use it ; or that there is no meaning in the dogma of

the Pope's infallibility because its only possible meaning is repudiated by all those who defend it. For nothing will be found unless we seek it in its right place. And for the ethics of a nation we must look only in that part of the nation which is their proper sphere; and that part is, as we have already shown, the vulgar part. And should any still imagine that if we thus limit the scope of our observation, we shall not be able to treat the subject exhaustively, we shall remind him that the vulgar classes, though not yet co-extensive with the nation, are still rapidly becoming so, vulgarity ascending and descending with equal certainty; since on the one hand it ruins all society into which it contrives to enter; whilst it thrives itself on the other hand, on all society that contrives to enter into it. To it therefore our whole study may be confined. Nor lastly, (for it is well to anticipate every possible objection) is there any need that even thus, we should study those classes that naturally possess social distinction,

that we may so learn in what its real essence consists; since, if we do but observe facts, we shall see that ignorance of the whole inner nature of good society is the chief characteristic of those who with most single-heartedness direct their lives towards getting into it. It will be enough then, without any farther explanation, to lay it down that social distinction is the chief good, and the end of all moral action; nor can the Aristotelians say that this is in reality a mediate end, and sought for only because it leads to happiness; since so far are men from seeking social distinction for the sake of happiness, that they are perpetually renouncing happiness for the sake of social distinction.'

'Capital, Mr. Laurence!' exclaimed Lady Ambrose, breaking into a low silvery laugh, as soon as Laurence had ended. 'And how true that is about those people who really ruin the society into which they contrive to push themselves!'

Lord Allen, who caught Miss Merton's eye at this moment, gave a very faint smile.

'So you see,' said Laurence, 'that you were quite right, Lady Ambrose, by instinctively beginning with exclusion.'

'Still,' said Allen, 'I'm afraid that all this is rather selfish. These people who want to be so smart, are, I dare say, not much the worse because of it. Indeed, myself, I rather like a good snob now and then.'

'Well,' said Laurence, 'let me read a few more paragraphs, and you will see. *'Such being the end,'* he goes on, *'of all moral action, virtue or morality is that state of mind which desires this end; and virtuous or moral acts are those which help us on towards it, provided only that they are done with purpose. For acts done not with purpose, but by chance, are not to be held moral. Now the nature of purpose is well explained by Aristotle, when he says that its object is all such voluntary action as is the result of deliberation.*

And what then is the object of deliberation? Let us consider that: for men, it is evident, do not deliberate about all matters alike; since in addition to their continually not deliberating in cases when they ought, there are many matters about which deliberation is out of the question. Thus no one deliberates about what is in its nature immutable, as how to alter vulgarity of a people's member of Parliament; nor about necessary things, as how to alleviate the misery of the starving poor; nor about things of chance, as how to prevent the dissemination of cholera; nor, again, about remote things which do not concern us, as, to use a former instance, how to alleviate the misery of the starving poor, nor does anyone deliberate about impossible things, as how to check the poisonous adulteration of food; nor about things that are past and lost, as how to do anything for the glory of England; nor lastly do we deliberate about things we do not care about, as how to get that lost glory back again. Deliberation,

then, only takes place about such matters as our own agency can effect, and which we wish it should effect. Virtue, therefore, being thus based on deliberation, is manifestly not one of those things that come to us by nature whether we will or no; but it is acquired by habit. The genus of moral virtue is a habit. But what special sort of habit? and how does it differ from all other habits? Let us consider this.

' We must remember first, that it is the office of every virtue to perfect that of which it is the virtue. Thus it is the virtue of a modern London house to be as badly built as possible and not be seen to be so; it is the virtue of an insured ship not to appear unseaworthy before she does so to the crew as she is foundering; and it is the virtue of butcher's meat, groceries and so forth, not to appear unfit for human consumption. In the same way moral virtue, or the virtue of a man, is that which makes him appear to be one thing to the

world, whilst in reality he is another. Such being the case, it is plain that in trying to be virtuous, we may, as in most other things, do too much, or too little ; and what is right will be a mean lying between these two extremes. Now of means there are two kinds, the absolute and the relative, either of which we can find in anything that is continuous ; the former, as when we take the bisecting point in a straight line, which is for all men one and the same ; the latter, as when we take the mean point or thing with reference to ourselves, in which case it will differ with our different requirements. Thus, if three be too small a number, and seventy-five too great, simply as an arithmetical problem, we take thirty-nine to be the mean, which exceeds three by as much as it is exceeded by seventy-five ; but with reference to ourselves we cannot so decide. For thirty-nine articles of religion may be too few for the present Archbishop of Westminster, and three may be too many for the Dean. Or again between 100l.

and 20l., the mean with regard to the matter itself would be 60l., but with regard to ourselves, not so. For 60l. would be too little to offer to a cook, and too much to offer to a curate. So in like manner that equality which constitutes moral virtue is not the absolute, but the relative mean. Moral virtue, then, we shall define to be a certain state, or habit of purpose, conforming in action to the relative mean, and adjusted to that mean as the worldly or snobbish man would adjust it. At this point we shall pause a moment to make a very slight change in the accepted terminology of the subject. We have hitherto spoken of the virtue of the vulgar classes as being a mean. We consider, however, that our language will be less ambiguous, if we take another form of the same word, and agree to call it a meanness. Moral virtue, then, is a meanness lying between two vices, its extremes; the one vice being that of excess, the other that of defect. Thus it is possible for a habit of mind to be so unrestrained

and vehement, that the acts it produces at once betray their motives and obtrude them on the observer ; it is possible for it, also, on the other hand, to be so weak and nerveless as never to produce any acts at all. For instance, the habit of thought in a clergyman may be so strong and unrestrained as to lead him to speak his whole conclusions out, and so get deprived of his living ; or on the other hand it may be so weak and undeveloped, that he comes to no conclusions at all, and so dies in a curacy ; the meaness between these two extremes being what is called vagueness, or the absence of any defined opinions, which is a great merit, and leads, in the Established Church, to high preferment. So also with habits of action, the general name given to the true meaness is worldliness, whereof the excess is snobbishness, and the defect independence. Worldliness being in its essence the former of these, and in its aspect the latter. Whence it follows that we may yet farther generally define the moral

meanness, as that which is inwardly one extreme, and which is outwardly the other.'

'Now,' said Laurence, 'though I don't suppose the writer of this really cared two straws whether the majority of people were mean and vulgar or no, there is a great deal of truth in what he says : and I think in our ideally good society, one of the first things we want is that it shall be unmixed and genuine ; I mean all its members must be of it, as well as in it. They must give it its *prestige*. We must have none that merely get their *prestige* from it.'

'Well,' said Allen, 'no doubt this exclusion is better, if it could be only managed.'

'Don't let us think yet,' said Laurence, 'about how to manage it. Let us see what we want first, and see what it costs afterwards.'

'I certainly believe,' said Miss Merton, 'that what I consider the extremely bad manners of a great many very fine ladies would all go, if a stop were put to this

jostling and scrambling that goes on about them, as Mr. Laurence proposes.'

'See,' said Laurence, 'here is one good fruit of exclusion at once—the redemption of our manners; and a most important fruit too, I think; for I hope we all start with the understanding that our society, ideally good as it is, is above none of those outward graces and refinements of behaviour and ways of living, that give us such pleasure now, when we find them.'

'And manner too, Mr. Laurence,' broke in Lady Ambrose, 'as well as manners—— Think what a charm there is in a really charming manner.'

'There is indeed,' exclaimed Mr. Stockton. 'The dear Duchess of —— for instance—— why there's a fascination even in the way in which she says good morning.'

'Ah yes,' said Lady Ambrose. 'Now there's what I call a *really* perfect manner for you.'

‘Very well,’ said Laurence, ‘and whatever is a really perfect manner, in our ideal society we must all have it.’

‘I must confess,’ said Allen, ‘that I get very sick sometimes of our conventional society manners; and I often long to have a good genuine savage to talk to.’

‘That,’ said Laurence, ‘is because of all the social shams that we have just agreed to get rid of. And to call the manner of society conventional, conveys no greater blame than if you were to call language conventional. For manner is but a second language, of which the best society speaks the purest dialect—the Attic, in fact. And as with language, so with manner, the more uniformity there is in it in some ways, the nicer shades of individuality shall we be able to express by it in others.’

‘Well,’ said Allen, shortly, ‘perhaps it is so. You are very likely right.’

‘And in manner,’ said Laurence, ‘I in-

clude *tone* too—that special and indescribable way of looking at things, and speaking of things, which characterises good society, and distinguishes it from the rest of the world so completely, and yet by marks so subtle that they would utterly escape the notice of those who don't know their meaning—that little extra stroke of polishing that brings to light such countless new delicate veins in the marble of life—the little extra stroke of the brush that puts a new refinement, and self-possession, into the face. As Browning says of a very different subject—

Oh, the little more, and how much it is,
And the little less and what worlds away.

And this is something quite independent of any special ability or special quality on the part of the individual people themselves; though of course the more gifted and cultivated they are, the greater will its charm be.'

'Yes,' said Miss Merton, thoughtfully,

and half to herself, 'I think all that is quite true.'

'Of course,' said Laurence, 'I know that tone alone can only make society good in a very narrow sense of the word. I merely mean that no amount of other qualities can make it really good, without tone.'

'I don't in the least object,' said Allen, 'to the marble being polished; but what I want first to be sure of is, that it is worth polishing.'

'Quite so,' said Laurence. 'What we must now consider, is what are all those special qualities and accomplishments, which will make a really perfect society the best among the best—such things as wit, knowledge, experience, humour, and so on—the veins, in fact, in the marble, that can be brought out by the polish.'

'Ah, yes, my dear Laurence,' began Mr. Luke, 'this is the great thing that we shall have to decide about; and it is this very

thing that I am always telling the world is——'

But he was interrupted by the advent of Mr. Herbert, who, with the exception of Mr. Storks and Dr. Jenkinson, was the only member of the party not already there. Mr. Herbert's whole aspect surprised everyone. At luncheon, as all remembered, he had been melancholy and desponding; but his face now wore a bright smile, and there was something that was almost gaiety in his elastic step. No one, however, ventured to ask him the reason of this pleasing change; but as he held an open newspaper in his hand, which he had apparently just received, it occurred to most that he must have seen in it 'something to his advantage.'

'Well,' he exclaimed to Laurence, in a manner quite in keeping with his look, 'and tell me now how are you getting on with your New Republic? You ought to make a very

beautiful thing out of it—all of you together, with so many charming ladies.'

'Do you think so?' said Laurence, in great surprise at this cheerful view of things.

'Yes,' answered Mr. Herbert, slowly and with decision. 'Ladies I always think, so long as they are good and honest, have beautiful imaginations. And now, let me ask you how you have set to work.'

Laurence explained to him that they had begun, on Leslie's suggestion, with considering what society, or the life of the highest classes, would be at its best; and that they were going to see afterwards what was implied in this.

'Indeed!' said Mr. Herbert, meditatively. 'Now, that is a really beautiful way of going about the business. And how far, let me ask you, have you got with your picture of these highest classes? I trust at all events that you have made a good beginning.'

‘A beginning,’ said Laurence, ‘is all that we have made. We have agreed that our society is to have the utmost polish, ease, and grace of manner, and the completest *savoir vivre*. It is, in fact, to be a sort of exemplar of human life at its highest conceivable completeness.’

‘Excuse me,’ said Mr. Herbert, ‘but the ways of polite life, and the manners of fine ladies and gentlemen, are beautiful only as the expression of a beautiful spirit! They are altogether hateful as the ornament or the covering of a vile one.’

‘Yes, Herbert, yes,’ exclaimed Mr. Luke, with a long sigh. ‘And I was just going to say this, when you joined us that to make society really good—even really brilliant and entertaining—one thing is wanted, and that is true and genuine culture. *Then* let us have the polish by all means; but let it be a diamond we polish, and not a pebble. Our society must be one that does not merely

dance, and hunt, and shoot. It must think, and reason, and read. It must be familiar—the whole of it must be familiar—with the great thoughts of the world, the great facts of the world, and the great books of the world. You want all this, if you would be perfectly brilliant in your *salons*, as well as really profound in your studies.'

This was assented to by nearly all. Lady Ambrose however looked a little uncomfortable, and not quite satisfied about something.

'Don't you think,' she said at last, 'that if everyone is to have so much culture, society will tend to become—well—just a little——'

'Well, Lady Ambrose?' said Laurence.

'Well, just a little bit *blue*. It will be all too bookish, if you understand what I mean. Don't you know when anyone comes to see you in London, and will talk of nothing but books, one always fancies it is because he isn't—it's very uncharitable to say so, but still it's

true—because he isn't very much in society, and doesn't know many people to talk about ?'

'I always think it such a blessing,' said Lord Allen, 'to find anyone who will talk about books, and will not be perpetually boring one with vulgar gossip and scandal.'

'Oh, so do I,' said Lady Ambrose eagerly, 'but that was not what I meant exactly. Mr. Laurence knows what I mean ; I'm sure he does. No one can delight in a book more than I ; but still—' she said, pausing to think how much of what she considered culture was to be found in those London drawing-rooms where she felt her own life completest, 'still—somehow—' she said with a faint smile, 'it is possible to be too literary, isn't it, as well as too anything else ?'

'Perfectly true, Lady Ambrose,' said Mr. Luke—Lady Ambrose was delighted—'people continually *are* too literary—to my cost I know it ; and that is because the world at large—what is called the reading world even more

than the non-reading world—are hopelessly at sea as to what books are, and what they really do for us. In other words, if you will forgive my harping as I do upon a single expression, they lack culture.'

'Why, I thought culture *was* books and literariness, and all that,' Lady Ambrose murmured half aloud, with a look of bewilderment. Mr. Herbert however suddenly came to her rescue.

'Now all this,' he said, 'is most interesting, but I feel myself, something as I imagine Lady Ambrose does, that I should like to know a little more clearly what culture is, and what you mean by it, when you call it the essence of good society.'

'Yes,' said Lady Ambrose, 'this is just what I like. Come Mr. Luke, suppose you were to tell us.'

'Suppose,' said Mr. Luke with an august wave of his hand, 'instead of that we ask Mr. Laurence to tell us. No one can do so better

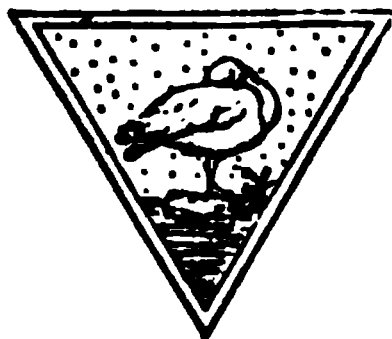
than he. I, Lādy Ambrose, have perhaps grown something too much of a specialist to be able to put these things in a sufficiently popular way.'

'Ah,' said Mr. Herbert, 'this is really nice. I shall like to listen to this. But you must allow me to be merely a listener, and not ask me for instruction. I assure you I am here altogether to be instructed.'

Laurence, with some diffidence, assented to what was asked of him ; and there was a general rustling on all sides of the party settling themselves down more luxuriously on the grass. Every influence of the summer afternoon conspired to make all take kindly to the topic—the living airy whisper of the leaves overhead, the wandering scents of the flowers that the breeze just made perceptible, the musical splash of the fountain in its quiet restlessness, the luxury of the mossy turf as soft as sleep or rose-leaves, and a far faint murmur of church-bells that now and then

invaded the ear gently, like a vague appealing dream. Mr. Saunders even was caressed by his flattered senses into peacefulness; the high and dry light of the intellect ceased to scintillate in his eyes; the spirit of progress condescended to take a temporary doze.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.



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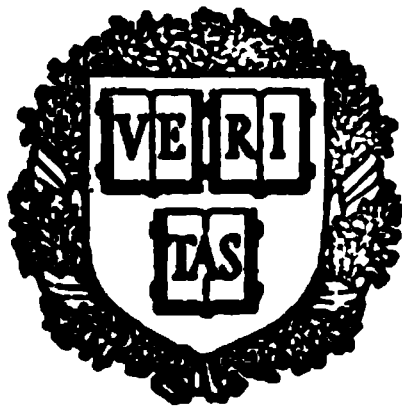
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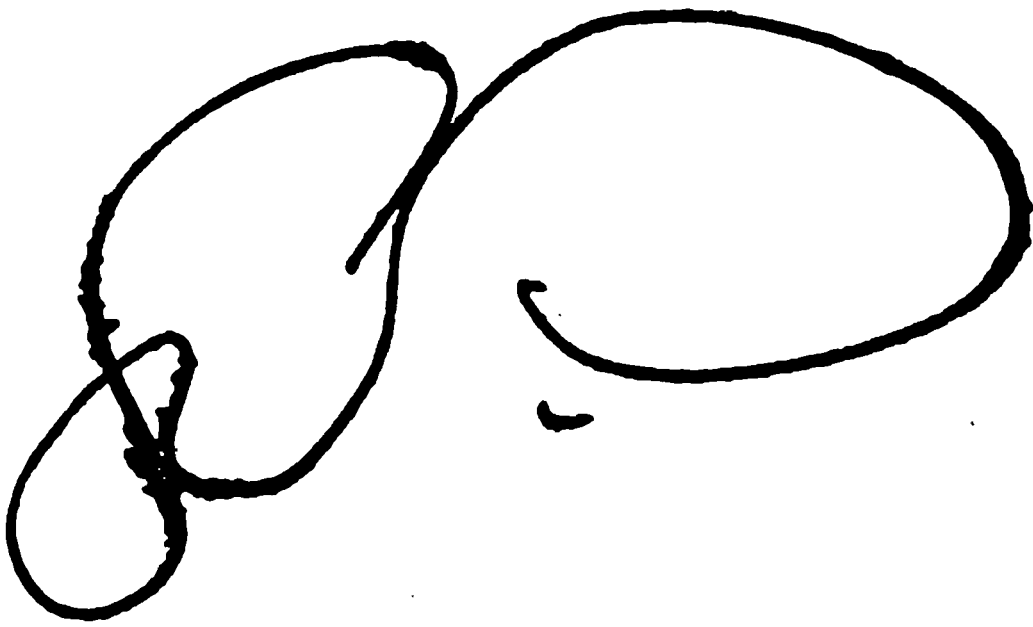


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